THE ADVENTURE OF
THE KIND MR. SMITH

ARISTIDE PUJOL started life on his own account as a chasseur in a Nice café—one of those luckless children tightly encased in bottle-green cloth by means of brass buttons, who earn a sketchy livelihood by enduring with cherubic smiles the continuous maledictions of the establishment. There he soothed his hours of servitude by dreams of vast ambitions. He would become the manager of a great hotel—not a contemptible hostelry where commercial travellers and seedy Germans were indifferently bedded, but one of those white palaces where milords (English) and millionaires (American) paid a thousand francs a night for a bedroom and five louis for a glass of beer. Now, in order to derive such profit from the Anglo-Saxon a knowledge of English was indispensable. He resolved to learn the language. How he did so, except by sheer effrontery, taking linguistic toll of frequenters of the café, would be a mystery to anyone unacquainted with Aristide. But to his friends his mastery of the English tongue in such circumstances is comprehensible. To Aristide the impossible was ever the one thing easy of attainment; the possible the one thing he never could achieve. That was the paradoxical nature of the man. Before his days of hunted-little-devildom were over he had acquired sufficient knowledge of English to carry him, a few years later, through various vicissitudes in England, until, fired by new social ambitions and self-educated in a haphazard way, he found himself appointed Professor of French in an academy for young ladies.

One of these days, when I can pin my dragonfly friend down to a plain, unvarnished autobiography, I may be able
to trace some chronological sequence in the kaleidoscopic changes in his career. But hitherto, in his talks with me, he flits about from any one date to any other during a couple of decades, in a manner so confusing that for the present I abandon such an attempt. All I know of the date of the episode I am about to chronicle is that it occurred immediately after the termination of his engagement at the academy just mentioned. Somehow, Aristide's history is a category of terminations.

If the headmistress of the academy had herself played dragon at his classes, all would have gone well. He would have made his pupils conjugate irregular verbs, rendered them adepts in the mysteries of the past participle and the subjunctive mood, and turned them out quite innocent of the idiomatic quaintnesses of the French tongue. But *dis aliter visum*. The gods always saw wrongheadedly otherwise in the case of Aristide. A weak-minded governess—and in a governess a sense of humour and of novelty is always a sign of a weak mind—played dragon during Aristide's lessons. She appreciated his method, which was colloquial. The colloquial Aristide was jocular. His lessons therefore were a giggling joy from beginning to end. He imparted to his pupils delicious knowledge. *En avez-vous des-z-homards?*  *Oh, les sales bêtes, elles ont du poil aux pattes*, which, being translated is 'Have you any lobsters? *Oh, the dirty animals, they have hair on their feet* '—a catch phrase which, some years ago, added greatly to the gaiety of Paris, but in which I must confess to seeing no gleam of wit—became the historic property of the school. He recited to them, till they were word-perfect, a music-hall ditty of the early 'eighties—*Sur le bi, sur le banc, sur le bi du bout du banc*, and delighted them with dissertations on Mme. Yvette Guilbert's earlier repertoire. But for him they would have gone to their lives' end without knowing that *pognon* meant money; *rouséance*, assaulting the police; *thune*, a five-franc piece; and *bouffer*, to take nourishment. He made (according to his own statement) French a living language. There was never a school in Great Britain, the Colonies, or America on which the Parisian accent was so electrically impressed. The retort, *Eh! ta sœur*, was the purest Montmartre; also *Fich'-moi la paix, mon petit*, and *Tu as un toupet, toi*; and the delectable locution, *Allons étrangler un perroquet* (let us strangle a parrot), employed by Apaches when inviting each other to drink a glass of absinthe,
soon became current French in the school for invitations to surreptitious cocoa-parties.

The progress that academy made in a real grip of the French language was miraculous; but the knowledge it gained in French grammar and syntax was deplorable. A certain mid-term examination—the paper being set by a neighbouring vicar—produced awful results. The phrase, "How do you do, dear?" which ought, by all the rules of Stratford-atte-Bowe, to be translated by Comment vous portez-vous, ma chère? was rendered by most of the senior scholars Eh, ma vieille, ça boulotte? One innocent and anachronistic damsel, writing on the execution of Charles I., declared that he cracha dans le panier in 1649, thereby mystifying the good vicar, who was unaware that "to spit into the basket" is to be guillotined. This wealth of vocabulary was discounted by abject poverty in other branches of the language. No one could give a list of the words in "al" that took "s" in the plural, no one knew anything at all about the defective verb échoir, and the orthography of the school would have disgraced a kindergarten. The headmistress suspected a lack of method in the teaching of M. Pujol, and one day paid his class a surprise visit.

The sight that met her eyes petrified her. The class, including the governess, bubbled and gurgled and shrieked with laughter. M. Pujol, his bright eyes agleam with merriment and his arms moving in frantic gestures, danced about the platform. He was telling them a story—and when Aristide told a story, he told it with the eloquence of his entire frame. He bent himself double and threw out his hands.

"Il était saoul comme un porc," he shouted.

And then came the hush of death. The rest of the artless tale about the man as drunk as a pig was never told. The headmistress, indignant majesty, strode up the room.

"M. Pujol, you have a strange way of giving French lessons."

"I believe, madame," said he, with a polite bow, "in interesting my pipils in their studies."

"Pupils have to be taught, not interested," said the headmistress. "Will you kindly put the class through some irregular verbs."

So for the remainder of the lesson Aristide, under the freezing eyes of the headmistress, put his sorrowful class through irregular verbs, of which his own knowledge was singularly inexact, and at the end received his dismissal. In
vain he argued. Outraged Minerva was implacable. Go he must.

We find him, then, one miserable December evening, standing on the arrival platform of Euston Station (the academy was near Manchester), an unwonted statue of dubiety. At his feet lay his meagre valise; in his hand was an enormous bouquet, a useful tribute of esteem from his disconsolate pupils; around him luggage-laden porters and passengers hurried; in front were drawn up the long line of cabs, their drivers' waterproofs glistening with wet; and in his pocket rattled the few paltry coins that, for Heaven knew how long, were to keep him from starvation. Should he commit the extravagance of taking a cab or should he go forth, valise in hand, into the pouring rain? He hesitated.

"Sacre mille cochons! Quel chien de climat!" he muttered.

A smart footman standing by turned quickly and touched his hat.

"Beg pardon, sir; I'm from Mr. Smith."
"I'm glad to hear it, my friend," said Aristide.
"You're the French gentleman from Manchester?"
"Decidedly," said Aristide.
"Then, sir, Mr. Smith has sent the carriage for you."
"That's very kind of him," said Aristide.

The footman picked up the valise and darted down the platform. Aristide followed. The footman held invitingly open the door of a cosy brougham. Aristide paused for the fraction of a second. Who was this hospitable Mr. Smith?

"Bah!" said he to himself, "the best way of finding out is to go and see."

He entered the carriage, sank back luxuriously on the soft cushions, and inhaled the warm smell of leather. They started, and soon the pelting rain beat harmlessly against the windows. Aristide looked out at the streaming streets, and, hugging himself comfortably, thanked Providence and Mr. Smith. But who was Mr. Smith? Tiens, thought he, there were two little Miss Smiths at the academy; he had pitied them because they had chilblains, freckles, and perpetual colds in their heads; possibly this was their kind papa. But, after all, what did it matter whose papa he was? He was expecting him. He had sent the carriage for him. Evidently a well-bred and attentive person. And tiens! there was even a hot-water can on the floor of the brougham. "He thinks
of everything, that man,” said Aristide. “I feel I am going to like him.”

The carriage stopped at a house in Hampstead, standing, as far as he could see in the darkness, in its own grounds. The footman opened the door for him to alight and escorted him up the front steps. A neat parlourmaid received him in a comfortably-furnished hall and took his hat and great-coat and magnificent bouquet.

“Mr. Smith hasn’t come back yet from the City, sir; but Miss Christabel is in the drawing-room.”

“Ah!” said Aristide. “Please give me back my bouquet.”

The maid showed him into the drawing-room. A pretty girl of three-and-twenty rose from a fender-stool and advanced smilingly to meet him.

“Good afternoon, M. le Baron. I was wondering whether Thomas would spot you. I’m so glad he did. You see, neither father nor I could give him any description, for we had never seen you.”

This fitted in with his theory. But why Baron? After all, why not? The English loved titles.

“He seems to be an intelligent fellow, mademoiselle.”

There was a span of silence. The girl looked at the bouquet, then at Aristide, who looked at the girl, then at the bouquet, then at the girl again.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “will you deign to accept these flowers as a token of my respectful homage?”

Miss Christabel took the flowers and blushed prettily. She had dark hair and eyes and a fascinating, upturned little nose, and the kindest little mouth in the world.

“An Englishman would not have thought of that,” she said.

Aristide smiled in his roguish way and raised a deprecating hand.

“Oh, yes, he would. But he would not have had—what you call the cheek to do it.”

Miss Christabel laughed merrily, invited him to a seat by the fire, and comforted him with tea and hot muffins. The frank charm of his girl-hostess captivated Aristide and drove from his mind the riddle of his adventure. Besides, think of the Arabian Nights’ enchantment of the change from his lonely and shabby bed-sitting-room in the Rusholme Road to this fragrant place with princess and all to keep him company! He watched the firelight dancing through her hair, the dainty
play of laughter over her face, and decided that the brougham had transported him to Bagdad instead of Hampstead.

"You have the air of a veritable princess," said he.

"I once met a princess—at a charity bazaar—and she was a most matter-of-fact, businesslike person."

"Bah!" said Aristide. "A princess of a charity bazaar! I was talking of the princess in a fairy-tale. They are the only real ones."

"Do you know," said Miss Christabel, "that when men pay such compliments to English girls they are apt to get laughed at?"

"Englishmen, yes," replied Aristide, "because they think over a compliment for a week, so that by the time they pay it, it is addled, like a bad egg. But we of Provence pay tribute to beauty straight out of our hearts. It is true. It is sincere. And what comes out of the heart is not ridiculous."

Again the girl coloured and laughed. "I've always heard that a Frenchman makes love to every woman he meets."

"Naturally," said Aristide. "If they are pretty. What else are pretty women for? Otherwise they might as well be hideous."

"Oh!" said the girl, to whom this Provençal point of view had not occurred.

"So, if I make love to you, it is but your due."

"I wonder what my fiancé would say if he heard you?"

"Your—?"

"My fiancé! There's his photograph on the table beside you. He is six foot one, and so jealous!" she laughed again.

"The Turk!" cried Aristide, his swiftly-conceived romance crumbling into dust. Then he brightened up. "But when this six feet of muscle and egotism is absent, surely other poor mortals can glean a smile?"

"You will observe that I'm not frowning," said Miss Christabel. "But you must not call my fiancé a Turk, for he's a very charming fellow whom I hope you'll like very much."

Aristide sighed. "And the name of this thrice-blessed mortal?"

Miss Christabel told his name—one Harry Ralston—and not only his name, but, such was the peculiar, childlike charm of Aristide Pujol, also many other things about him. He was the Honourable Harry Ralston, the heir to a great brewery peerage, and very wealthy. He was a member of Parliament.
and but for Parliamentary duties would have dined there that evening; but he was to come in later, as soon as he could leave the House. He also had a house in Hampshire, full of the most beautiful works of art. It was through their common hobby that her father and Harry had first made acquaintance.

"We’re supposed to have a very fine collection here," she said, with a motion of her hand.

Aristide looked round the walls and saw them hung with pictures in gold frames. In those days he had not acquired an extensive culture. Besides, who having before him the firelight gleaming through Miss Christabel’s hair could waste his time over painted canvas? She noted his cursory glance.

"I thought you were a connoisseur?"

"I am," said Aristide, his bright eyes fixed on her in frank admiration.

She blushed again; but this time she rose.

"I must go and dress for dinner. Perhaps you would like to be shown your room?"

He hung his head on one side:

"Have I been too bold, mademoiselle?"

"I don’t know," she said. "You see, I’ve never met a Frenchman before."

"Then a world of undreamed-of homage is at your feet," said he.

A servant ushered him up broad, carpeted staircases into a bedroom such as he had never seen in his life before. It was all curtains and hangings and rugs and soft couches and satin quilts and dainty writing-tables and subdued lights, and a great fire glowed red and cheerful, and before it hung a clean shirt. His poor little toilet apparatus was laid on the dressing-table, and (with a tact which he did not appreciate, for he had, sad to tell, no dress-suit) the servant had spread his precious frock-coat and spare pair of trousers on the bed. On the pillow lay his night-shirt, neatly folded.

"Evidently," said Aristide, impressed by these preparations, "it is expected that I wash myself now and change my clothes, and that I sleep here for the night. And for all that the ravishing Miss Christabel is engaged to her honourable Harry, this is none the less a corner of Paradise."

So Aristide attired himself in his best, which included a white tie and a pair of nearly new brown boots—a long task, as he found that his valise had been spirited away and its contents, including the white tie of ceremony (he had but one),
hidden in unexpected drawers and wardrobes—and eventually went downstairs into the drawing-room. There he found Miss Christabel and, warming himself on the hearthrug, a bald-headed, beefy-faced Briton, with little pig's eyes and a hearty manner, attired in a dinner-suit.

"My dear fellow," said this personage, with outstretched hand, "I'm delighted to have you here. I've heard so much about you; and my little girl has been singing your praises."

"Mademoiselle is too kind," said Aristide.

"You must take us as you find us," said Mr. Smith. "We're just ordinary folk, but I can give you a good bottle of wine and a good cigar—it's only in England, you know, that you can get champagne fit to drink and cigars fit to smoke—and I can give you a glimpse of a modest English home. I believe you haven't a word for it in French."

"Moi foi, no," said Aristide, who had once or twice before heard this lunatic charge brought against his country. "In France the men all live in cafés, the children are all put out to nurse, and the women, saving the respect of mademoiselle—well, the less said about them the better."

"England is the only place, isn't it?" Mr. Smith declared heartily. "I don't say that Paris hasn't its points. But after all—the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergères and that sort of thing soon pall, you know—soon pall."

"Yet Paris has its serious side," argued Aristide. "There is always the tomb of Napoleon."

"Papa will never take me to Paris," sighed the girl.

"You shall go there on your honeymoon," said Mr. Smith.

Dinner was announced. Aristide gave his arm to Miss Christabel, and proud not only of his partner, but also of his frock-coat, white tie, and shiny brown boots, strutted into the dining-room. The host sat at the end of the beautifully set table, his daughter on his right, Aristide on his left. The meal began gaily. The kind Mr. Smith was in the best of humours.

"And how is our dear old friend, Jules Dancourt?" he asked.

"Tien!" said Aristide to himself, "we have a dear friend Jules Dancourt. Wonderfully well," he replied at a venture, "but he suffers terribly at times from the gout."

"So do I, confound it!" said Mr. Smith, drinking sherry.

"You and the good Jules were always sympathetic," said
Aristide. "Ah! he has spoken to me so often about you, the tears in his eyes."

"Men cry, my dear, in France," Mr. Smith explained. "They also kiss each other."

"Ah, mais c'est un beau pays, mademoiselle!" cried Aristide, and he began to talk of France and to draw pictures of his country which set the girl's eyes dancing. After that he told some of the funny little stories which had brought him disaster at the academy. Mr. Smith, with jovial magnanimity, declared that he was the first Frenchman he had ever met with a sense of humour.

"But I thought, Baron," said he, "that you lived all your life shut up in that old château of yours?"

"Tiens!" thought Aristide. "I am still a Baron, and I have an old château."

"Tell us about the château. Has it a fosse and a drawbridge and a Gothic chapel?" asked Miss Christabel.

"Which one do you mean?" inquired Aristide, airily.

"For I have two."

When relating to me this Arabian Nights' adventure, he drew my special attention to his astuteness. His host's eye quivered in a wink. "The one in Languedoc," said he.

Languedoc! Almost Pujol's own country! With entire lack of morality, but with picturesque imagination, Aristide plunged into a description of that non-existent baronial hall. Fosse, drawbridge, Gothic chapel were but insignificant features. It had tourelles, emblazoned gateways, bastions, donjons, haribicans; it had innumerable rooms; in the salle des chevaliers two hundred men-at-arms had his ancestors fed at a sitting. There was the room in which François Premier had slept, and one in which Joan of Arc had almost been assassinated. What the name of himself or of his ancestors was supposed to be Aristide had no ghost of an idea. But as he proceeded with the erection of his airy palace he gradually began to believe in it. He invested the place with a living atmosphere; conjured up a staff of family retainers, notable one Marie-Joseph Loufoque, the wizened old major-domo, with his long white whiskers and blue and silver livery. There were also Madeline Mioules, the cook, and Bernadet the groom, and La Petite Fripette the goose girl. Ah! they should see La Petite Fripette! And he kept dogs and horses and cows and ducks and hens—and there was a great pond
whence frogs were drawn to be fed for the consumption of the household.

Miss Christabel shivered. "I should not like to eat frogs."

"They also eat snails," said her father.

"I have a snail farm," said Aristide. "You never saw such interesting little animals. They are so intelligent. If you're kind to them they come and eat out of your hand."

"You've forgotten the pictures," said Mr. Smith.

"Ah! the pictures," cried Aristide, with a wide sweep of his arms. "Galleries full of them. Raphael, Michael Angelo, Wiertz, Reynolds—"

He paused, not in order to produce the effect of a dramatic apostrophe, but because he could not for the moment remember other names of painters.

"It is a truly historical château," said he.

"I should love to see it," said the girl.

Aristide threw out his arms across the table. "It is yours, mademoiselle, for your honeymoon," said he.

Dinner came to an end. Miss Christabel left the gentlemen to their wine, an excellent port whose English qualities were vaunted by the host. Aristide, full of food and drink and the mellow glories of the castle in Languedoc, and smoking an enormous cigar, felt at ease with all the world. He knew he should like the kind Mr. Smith, hospitable though somewhat insular man. He could stay with him for a week—or a month—why not a year?

After coffee and liqueurs had been served Mr. Smith rose and switched on a powerful electric light at the end of the large room, showing a picture on an easel covered by a curtain. He beckoned to Aristide to join him and, drawing the curtain, disclosed the picture.

"There!" said he. "Isn't it a stunner?"

It was a picture all grey skies and grey water and grey feathery trees, and a little man in the foreground wore a red cap.

"It is beautiful, but indeed it is magnificent!" cried Aristide, always impressionable to things of beauty.

"Genuine Corot, isn't it?"

"Without doubt," said Aristide.

His host poked him in the ribs. "I thought I'd astonish you. You wouldn't believe Gottschalk could have done it. There it is—as large as life and twice as natural. If you or
anyone else can tell it from a genuine Corot I'll eat my hat. And all for eight pounds."

Aristide looked at the beefy face and caught a look of cunning in the little pig's eyes.

"Now are you satisfied?" asked Mr. Smith.

"More than satisfied," said Aristide, though what he was to be satisfied about passed, for the moment, his comprehension.

"If it was a copy of an existing picture, you know—one might have understood it—that, of course, would be dangerous—but for a man to go and get bits out of various Corots and stick them together like this is miraculous. If it hadn't been for a matter of business principle I'd have given the fellow eight guineas instead of pounds—hanged if I wouldn't! He deserves it."

"He does indeed," said Aristide Pujol.

"And now that you've seen it with your own eyes, what do you think you might ask me for it? I suggested something between two and three thousand—shall we say three? You're the owner, you know." Again the process of rib-digging.

"Came out of that historic château of yours. My eye! you're a holy terror when you begin to talk. You almost persuaded me it was real."

"Tiens!" said Aristide to himself. "I don't seem to have a château after all."

"Certainly three thousand," said he, with a grave face.

"That young man thinks he knows a lot, but he doesn't," said Mr. Smith.

"Ah!" said Aristide, with singular laconicism.

"Not a blooming thing," continued his host. "But he'll pay three thousand, which is the principal, isn't it? He's partner in the show, you know, Ralston, Wiggins, and Wix's Brewery"—Aristide pricked up his ears—"and when his doddering old father dies he'll be Lord Ranelagh and come into a million of money."

"Has he seen the picture?" asked Aristide.

"Oh, yes. Regards it as a masterpiece. Didn't Brauneberger tell you of the Lancret we planted on the American?" Mr. Smith rubbed hearty hands at the memory of the iniquity.

"Same old game. Always easy. I have nothing to do with the bargaining or the sale. Just an old friend of the ruined French nobleman with the historic château and family treasures. He comes along and fixes the price. I told our friend Harry——"
“Good,” thought Aristide. “This is the same Honourable Harry, M.P., who is engaged to the ravishing Miss Christabel.”

“I told him,” said Mr. Smith, “that it might come to three or four thousand. He jibbed a bit—so when I wrote to you I said two or three. But you might try him with three to begin with.”

Aristide went back to the table and poured himself out a fresh glass of his kind host’s 1865 brandy and drank it off.

“Exquisite, my dear fellow,” said he. “I’ve none finer in my historic château.”

“Don’t suppose you have,” grinned the host, joining him. He slapped him on the back. “Well,” said he, with a shifty look in his little pig’s eyes, “let us talk business. What do you think would be your fair commission? You see, all the trouble and invention have been mine. What do you say to four hundred pounds?”

“Five,” said Aristide, promptly.

A sudden gleam came into the little pig’s eyes.

“Done!” said Mr. Smith, who had imagined that the other would demand a thousand and was prepared to pay eight hundred. “Done!” said he again.

They shook hands to seal the bargain and drank another glass of old brandy. At that moment, a servant, entering, took the host aside.

“Please excuse me a moment,” said he, and went with the servant out of the room.

Aristide, left alone, lighted another of his kind host’s fat cigars and threw himself into a great leathern arm-chair by the fire, and surrendered himself deliciously to the soothing charm of the moment. Now and then he laughed, finding a certain comicality in his position. And what a charming father-in-law, this kind Mr. Smith!

His cheerful reflections were soon disturbed by the sudden irruption of his host and a grizzled, elderly, foxy-faced gentleman with a white moustache, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in the buttonhole of his overcoat.

“Here, you!” cried the kind Mr. Smith, striding up to Aristide, with a very red face. “Will you have the kindness to tell me who the devil you are?”

Aristide rose, and, putting his hands behind the tails of his frock-coat, stood smiling radiantly on the hearthrug. A wit much less alert than my irresponsible friend’s would have
instantly appreciated the fact that the real Simon Pure had arrived on the scene.

"I, my dear friend," said he, "am the Baron de Je ne Sais Plus."

"You're a confounded impostor," spluttered Mr. Smith.

"And this gentleman here to whom I have not had the pleasure of being introduced?" asked Aristide, blandly.

"I am M. Poiron, monsieur, the agent of Messrs. Brauneberger and Compagnie, art dealers, of the Rue Notre Dame des Petits Champs of Paris," said the new-comer, with an air of defiance.

"Ah, I thought you were the Baron," said Aristide.

"There's no blooming Baron at all about it!" screamed Mr. Smith. "Are you Poiron, or is he?"

"I would not have a name like Poiron for anything in the world," said Aristide. "My name is Aristide Pujol, soldier of fortune, at your service."

"How the blazes did you get here?"

"Your servant asked me if I was a French gentleman from Manchester. I was. He said that Mr. Smith had sent his carriage for me. I thought it hospitable of the kind Mr. Smith. I entered the carriage—et voilà!"

"Then clear out of here this very minute," said Mr. Smith, reaching forward his hand to the bell-push.

Aristide checked his impulsive action.

"Pardon me, dear host," said he. "It is raining dogs and cats outside. I am very comfortable in your luxurious home. I am here, and here I stay."

"I'm shot if you do," said the kind Mr. Smith, his face growing redder and uglier. "Now, will you go out, or will you be thrown out?"

Aristide, who had no desire whatever to be ejected from this snug nest into the welter of the wet and friendless world, puffed at his cigar, and looked at his host with the irresistible drollery of his eyes.

"You forget, mon cher ami," said he, "that neither the beautiful Miss Christabel nor her affianced, the Honourable Harry, M.P., would care to know that the talented Gottschalk got only eight pounds, not even guineas, for painting that three-thousand-pound picture."

"So it's blackmail, eh?"

"Precisely," said Aristide, "and I don't blush at it."

"You infernal little blackguard!"
"I seem to be in congenial company," said Aristide. "I
don't think our friend M. Poiron has more scruples than he
has right to the ribbon of the Legion of Honour which he is
wearing."

"How much will you take to go out? I have a cheque-
book handy."

Mr. Smith moved a few steps from the hearthrug. Aristide
sat down in the arm-chair. An engaging, fantastic impudence
was one of the charms of Aristide Pujol.

"I'll take five hundred pounds," said he, "to stay in."

"Stay in?" Mr. Smith grew apoplectic.

"Yes," said Aristide. "You can't do without me. Your
daughter and your servants know me as M. le Baron—by the
way, what is my name? And where is my historic château
in Languedoc?"

"Mireilles," said M. Poiron, who was sitting grim and
taciturn on one of the dining-room chairs. "And the place
is the same, near Montpellier."

"I like to meet an intelligent man," said Aristide.

"I should like to wring your infernal neck," said the kind
Mr. Smith. "But, by George, if we do let you in you'll have
to sign me a receipt implicating yourself up to the hilt. I'm
not going to be put into the cart by you, you can bet your
life."

"Anything you like," said Aristide, "so long as we all
swing together."

Now, when Aristide Pujol arrived at this point in his
narrative, I, his chronicler, who am nothing if not an eminently
respectable, law-abiding Briton, took him warmly to task for
his sheer absence of moral sense. His eyes, as they sometimes
did, assumed a luminous pathos.

"My dear friend," said he, "have you ever faced the world
in a foreign country in December with no character, and
fifteen pounds five and threepence in your pocket? Five
hundred pounds was a fortune. It is one now. And to be
gained just by lending oneself to a good farce, which didn't
hurt anybody. You and your British morals! Bah!" said
he, with a fine flourish.

Aristide, after much parleying, was finally admitted into
the nefarious brotherhood. He was to retain his rank as the
Baron de Mireilles, and play the part of the pecuniarily incon-
venienced nobleman forced to sell some of his rare collection. Mr. Smith had heard of the Corot through their dear old common friend, Jules Dancourt of Rheims, had mentioned it alluringly to the Honourable Harry, had arranged for the Baron, who was visiting England, to bring it over and dispatch it to Mr. Smith's house, and on his return from Manchester to pay a visit to Mr. Smith, so that he could meet the Honourable Harry in person. In whatever transaction ensued Mr. Smith, so far as his prospective son-in-law was concerned, was to be the purely disinterested friend. It was Aristide's wit which invented a part for the supplanted M. Poiron. He should be the eminent Parisian expert who, chancing to be in London, had been telephoned for by the kind Mr. Smith.

"It would not be wise for M. Poiron," said Aristide, chuckling inwardly with puckish glee, "to stay here for the night—or for two or three days—or a week—like myself. He must go back to his hotel when the business is concluded."

"Mais, pardon!" cried M. Poiron, who had been formally invited, and had arrived late solely because he had missed his train at Manchester, and come on by the next one. "I cannot go out into the wet, and I have no hotel to go to."

Aristide appealed to his host. "But he is unreasonable, cher ami. He must play his rôle. M. Poiron has been telephoned for. He can't possibly stay here. Surely five hundred pounds is worth one little night of discomfort? And there are a legion of hotels in London."

"Five hundred pounds!" exclaimed M. Poiron. "Qu'est-ce que vous chantez là? I want more than five hundred pounds."

"Then you're jolly well not going to get it," cried Mr. Smith, in a rage. "And as for you"—he turned on Aristide—"I'll wring your infernal neck yet."

"Calm yourself, calm yourself!" smiled Aristide, who was enjoying himself hugely.

At this moment the door opened and Miss Christabel appeared. On seeing the decorated stranger she started with a little "Oh!" of surprise.

"I beg your pardon."

Mr. Smith's angry face wreathed itself in smiles.

"This, my darling, is M. Poiron, the eminent Paris expert, who has been good enough to come and give us his opinion on the picture."

M. Poiron bowed. Aristide advanced.
"Mademoiselle, your appearance is like a mirage in a desert."

She smiled indulgently and turned to her father. "I've been wondering what had become of you. Harry has been here for the last half-hour."

"Bring him in, dear child, bring him in!" said Mr. Smith, with all the heartiness of the fine old English gentleman. "Our good friends are dying to meet him."

The girl flickered out of the room like a sunbeam (the phrase is Aristide's), and the three precious rascals put their heads together in a hurried and earnest colloquy. Presently Miss Christabel returned, and with her came the Honourable Harry Ralston, a tall, soldierly fellow, with close-cropped fair curly hair and a fair moustache, and frank blue eyes that, even in Parliament, had seen no harm in his fellow-creatures. Aristide's magical vision caught him wincing ever so little at Mr. Smith's effusive greeting and overdone introductions. He shook Aristide warmly by the hand.

"You have a beauty there, Baron, a perfect beauty," said he, with the insane ingenuousness of youth. "I wonder how you can manage to part with it."

"Ma foi," said Aristide, with his back against the end of the dining-table and gazing at the masterpiece. "I have so many at the Château de Mireilles. When one begins to collect, you know—and when one's grandfather and father have had also the divine mania—"

"You were saying, M. le Baron," said M. Poiron of Paris, "that your respected grandfather bought this direct from Corot himself."

"A commission," said Aristide. "My grandfather was a patron of Corot."

"Do you like it, dear?" asked the Honourable Harry.

"Oh, yes!" replied the girl, fervently. "It is beautiful. I feel like Harry about it." She turned to Aristide. "How can you part with it? Were you really in earnest when you said you would like me to come and see your collection?"

"For me," said Aristide, "it would be a visit of enchantment."

"You must take me, then," she whispered to Harry. "The Baron has been telling us about his lovely old château."

"Will you come, monsieur?" asked Aristide.

"Since I'm going to rob you of your picture," said the young man, with smiling courtesy, "the least I can do is to
pay you a visit of apology. "Lovely!" said he, going up to the
Corot.

Aristide took Miss Christabel, now more bewitching than
ever with the glow of young love in her eyes and a flush on her
cheek, a step or two aside and whispered:

"But he is charming, your fiancé! He almost deserves
his good fortune."

"Why almost?" she laughed, shyly.

"It is not a man, but a demi-god, that would deserve you,
mademoiselle."

M. Poiron's harsh voice broke out.

"You see, it is painted in the beginning of Corot's later
manner—it is 1864. There is the mystery which, when he
was quite an old man, became a trick. If you were to put
it up to auction at Christie's it would fetch, I am sure, five
thousand pounds."

"That's more than I can afford to give," said the young
man, with a laugh. "Mr. Smith mentioned something
between three and four thousand pounds. I don't think I
can go above three."

"I have nothing to do with it, my dear boy, nothing what-
ever," said Mr. Smith, rubbing his hands. "You wanted a
Corot. I said I thought I could put you on to one. It's for
the Baron here to mention his price. I retire now and for
ever."

"Well, Baron?" said the young man, cheerfully, "what's
your idea?"

Aristide came forward and resumed his place at the end of
the table. The picture was in front of him beneath the strong
electric light; on his left stood Mr. Smith and Poiron, on his
right Miss Christabel and the Honourable Harry.

"I'll not take three thousand pounds for it," said Aristide.

"A picture like that! Never!"

"I assure you it would be a fair price," said Poiron.

"You mentioned that figure yourself only just now," said
Mr. Smith, with an ugly glitter in his little pig's eyes.

"I presume, gentlemen," said Aristide, "that this picture
is my own property." He turned engagingly to his host.

"Is it not, cher ami?"

"Of course it is. Who said it wasn't?"

"And you, M. Poiron, acknowledge formally that it is
mine," he asked, in French.

"Sans aucun doute."
"Eh bien," said Aristide, throwing open his arms and gazing round sweetly. "I have changed my mind. I do not sell the picture at all."

"Not sell it? What the—what do you mean?" asked Mr. Smith, striving to mellow the gathering thunder on his brow.

"I do not sell," said Aristide. "Listen, my dear friends!" He was in the seventh heaven of happiness—the principal man, the star, taking the centre of the stage. "I have an announcement to make to you. I have fallen desperately in love with mademoiselle."

There was a general gasp. Mr. Smith looked at him, red-faced and open-mouthed. Miss Christabel blushed furiously and emitted a sound half between a laugh and a scream. Harry Ralston's eyes flashed.

"My dear sir—" he began.

"Pardon," said Aristide, disarming him with the merry splendour of his glance. "I do not wish to take mademoiselle from you. My love is hopeless! I know it. But it will feed me to my dying day. In return for the joy of this hopeless passion I will not sell you the picture—I give it to you as a wedding present."

He stood, with the air of a hero, both arms extended towards the amazed pair of lovers.

"I give it to you," said he. "It is mine. I have no wish but for your happiness. In my Château de Mireilles there are a hundred others."

"This is madness!" said Mr. Smith, bursting with suppressed indignation, so that his bald head grew scarlet.

"My dear fellow!" said Mr. Harry Ralston. "It is unheard-of generosity on your part. But we can't accept it."

"Then," said Aristide, advancing dramatically to the picture, "I take it under my arm, I put it in a hansom cab, and I go with it back to Languedoc."

Mr. Smith caught him by the wrist and dragged him out of the room.

"You little brute! Do you want your neck broken?"

"Do you want the marriage of your daughter with the rich and Honourable Harry broken?" asked Aristide.

"Oh, damn! Oh, damn! Oh, damn!" cried Mr. Smith, stamping about helplessly and half weeping.

Aristide entered the dining-room and beamed on the company.
"The kind Mr. Smith has consented. Mr. Honourable Harry and Miss Christabel, there is your Corot. And now, may I be permitted?" He rang the bell. A servant appeared.

"Some champagne to drink to the health of the fiancés," he cried. " Lots of champagne."

Mr. Smith looked at him almost admiringly.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "You have got a nerve."

"Voilà!" said Aristide, when he had finished the story.

"And did they accept the Corot?" I asked.

"Of course. It is hanging now in the big house in Hampshire. I stayed with the kind Mr. Smith for six weeks," he added, doubling himself up in his chair and hugging himself with mirth, "and we became very good friends. And I was at the wedding."

"And what about their honeymoon visit to Languedoc?"

"Alas!" said Aristide. "The morning before the wedding I had a telegram—it was from my old father at Aigues-Mortes—to tell me that the historic Château de Mircales, with my priceless collection of pictures, had been burned to the ground."
MORE CRICKET

A SCRATCH LOT. I. THE CHOOSING OF THE DAY

As soon as I had promised to take an eleven down to Chartleigh I knew that I was in for trouble; but I did not realize how great it would be until I consulted Henry Barton. Henry is a first-class cricketer, and it was my idea that he should do all the batting for us, and such of the bowling as the laws allowed. I had also another idea, and this I explained to Henry.

"As you are aware," I said, "the ideal side contains five good bats, four good bowlers, a wicket-keeper, and Henry Barton."

"Quite so," agreed Henry.

"That is the principle on which one selects an eleven. Now, I intend to strike out a line of my own. My team shall consist of three authors or journalists, two solicitors, four barristers, a couple from the Stock Exchange, some civil servants, and an artist or two. How many is that?"

"Nineteen."

"Well, that's the idea, anyhow."

"It's a rotten idea."

"No, it's a splendid idea. I wonder nobody has thought of it before. I send a solicitor and a journalist in first. The journalist uses the long handle, while the solicitor plays for keeps."

"And where does the artist come in?"

"The artist comes in last, and plays for a draw. You are very slow to-day, Henry."

Henry, the man of leisure, thought a moment.
“Yes, that’s all very well for you working men,” he said at last, “but what do I go as? Or am I one of the barristers?”

“You go as ‘with Barton.’ Yes. If you’re very good you shall have an ‘H’ in brackets after you. ‘With Barton (II).’”

The method of choosing my team being settled, the next thing was the day. “Any day in the first week in July,” the Chartleigh captain had said. Now at first sight there appear to be seven days in the week, but it is not really so. For instance, Saturday. Now there’s a good day! What could one object to in a Saturday?

But do you imagine Henry Barton would let it pass?

“I don’t think you’ll get eleven people for the Saturday,” he said. “People are always playing cricket on Saturday.”


“But I mean they’ll have arranged to play already with their own teams. Or else they’ll be going away for week-ends.”

“One can spend a very pretty week-end at Chartleigh.”

“H’m, let me think. Any day in the week, isn’t it?”

“Except, apparently, Saturday,” I said huffily.

“Let’s see now, what days are there?”

I mentioned two or three of the better-known ones.

“Yes. Of course, some of those are impossible, though. We’d better go through the week and see which is best.”

I don’t know who Barton is that he should take it upon himself to make invidious distinctions between the days of the week.

“Very well, then,” I said. “Sunday.”

“Ass.”

That seemed to settle Sunday, so we passed on to Monday.

“You won’t get your stockbroker on Monday,” said Henry.

“It’s Contanger day or something with them every Monday.”

“Stocktaking, don’t you mean?”

“I dare say. Anyhow, no one in the House can get away on a Monday.”

“I must have my stockbrokers. Tuesday.”

Tuesday, it seemed, was hopeless. I was a fool to have thought of Tuesday. Why, everybody knew that Tuesday was an impossible day for——

I forget what spoilt Tuesday’s chance. I fancy it was a busy day for civil servants. No one in the Home Civil can get away on a Tuesday. I know that sounds absurd, but Henry was being absurd just then. Or was it barristers? Briefs get
given out on a Tuesday, I was made to understand. That brought us to Wednesday. I hoped much from Wednesday.

"Yes," said Henry. "Wednesday might do. Of course most of the weeklies go to press on Wednesday. Rather an awkward day for journalists. What about Thursday?"

I began to get annoyed.

"Thursday my flannel trousers go to the press," I said—"that is to say, they come back from the wash then."

"Look here, why try to be funny?"

"Hang it, who started it? Talking about Contanger days. Contanger—it sounds like a new kind of guano."

"Well, if you don’t believe it—"

"Henry, I do. Thursday be it, then."

"Yes, I suppose that’s all right," said Henry doubtfully.

"Why not? Don’t say it’s sending-in day with artists," I implored. "Not every Thursday?"

"No. Only there’s Friday, and—"

"Friday is my busy day," I pleaded—"my one ewe lamb. Do not rob me of it."

"It’s a very good day, Friday. I think you’d find that most people could get off then."

"But why throw over Thursday like this? A good, honest day, Henry. Many people get born on a Thursday, Henry. And it’s a marrying day, Henry. A nice, clean, sober day, and you—"

"The fact is," said Henry, "I’ve suddenly remembered I’m engaged myself on Thursday."

This was too much.

"Henry," I said coldly, "you forget yourself—you forget yourself strangely, my lad. Just because I was weak enough to promise you an ‘H’ after your name. You seem to have forgotten that the ‘H’ was to be in brackets."

"Yes, but I’m afraid I really am engaged."

"Are you really? Look here—I’ll leave out the ‘with’ and you shall be one of us. There! Baby, see the pretty gentleman!"

Henry smiled and shook his head.

"Oh, well," I said, "we must have you. So if you say Friday, Friday it is. You’re quite sure Friday is all right for solicitors? Very well, then."

So the day was settled for Friday. It was rather a pity, because, as I said, in the ordinary way Friday is the day I put aside for work.
II. THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

The committee consisted of Henry and myself. Originally it was myself alone, but as soon as I had selected Henry I proceeded to co-opt him, reserving to myself, however, the right of a casting vote in case of any difference of opinion. One arose, almost immediately, over Higgins. Henry said:

(a) That Higgins had once made ninety-seven.
(b) That he had been asked to play for his county.
(c) That he was an artist, and we had arranged to have an artist in the team.

In reply I pointed out:

(a) That ninety-seven was an extremely unlikely number for anyone to have made.
(b) That if he had been asked he evidently hadn’t accepted, which showed the sort of man he was; besides which, what was his county?
(c) That, assuming for the moment he had made ninety-seven, was it likely he would consent to go in last and play for a draw, which was why we wanted the artist? And that, anyhow, he was a jolly bad artist.
(d) That hadn’t we better put it to the vote?

This was accordingly done, and an exciting division ended in a tie.

Those in favour of Higgins . . . . . 1
 Those against Higgins . . . . . 1

The Speaker gave his casting vote against Higgins.

Prior to this, however, I had laid before the House the letter of invitation. It was as follows (and, I flatter myself, combined tact with a certain dignity):

"DEAR——, I am taking a team into the country on Friday week to play against the village eleven. The ground and the lunch are good. Do you think you could manage to come down? I know you are very busy just now with—

Contingers,
Briefs,
Clients,
Your Christmas Number,
Varnishing Day,
(Strike out all but one of these)
but a day in the country would do you good. I hear from all
sides that you are in great form this season. I will give you all
particulars about trains later on. Good-bye. Remember me
to——. How is——? Ever yours.

"P.S.—Old Henry is playing for us. He has strained
himself a little and probably won’t bowl much, so I expect we
shall all have a turn with the ball.”

Or, “I don’t think you have ever met Henry Barton, the
cricketer. He is very keen on meeting you. Apparently he
has seen you play somewhere. He will be turning out for us
on Friday.

“P.P.S.—We might manage to have some bridge in the
train.”

“That,” I said to Henry, “is what I call a clever letter.”
“What makes you think that?”
“It is all clever,” I said modestly. “But the cleverest part
is a sentence at the end. ‘I will give you all particulars about
trains later on.’ You see I have been looking them up, and
we leave Victoria at seven-thirty a.m. and get back to London
Bridge at eleven-forty-five p.m.”

The answers began to come in the next day. One of the
first was from Bolton, the solicitor, and it upset us altogether.
For, after accepting the invitation, he went on: “I am afraid I
don’t play bridge. As you may remember, I used to play chess
at Cambridge, and I still keep it up.”

“Chess,” said Henry. “That’s where White plays and
mates in two moves. And there’s a Black too. He does some-
thing.”

“We shall have to get a Black. This is awful.”
“Perhaps Bolton would like to do problems by himself all
the time.”
“That would be rather bad luck on him. No, look here.
Here’s Carey. Glad to come, but doesn’t bridge. He’s the
man.”

Accordingly we wired to Carey: “Do you play chess?
Reply at once.” He answered, “No. Why?”
“Carey will have to play that game with glass balls.
Solitaire. Yes. We must remember to bring a board with us.”
“But what about the chess gentleman?” asked Henry.
“I must go and find one. We’ve had one refusal.”

There is an editor I know slightly, so I called upon him at
his office. I found him writing verses.
"Be brief," he said; "I'm frightfully busy."
"I have just three questions to ask you," I replied.
"What rhymes with 'yorker'?"
"That wasn't one of them."
"Yorker—corker—por——"
"Better make it a full pitch," I suggested. "Step out
and make it a full pitch. Then there are such lots of rhymes."
"Thanks, I will. Well?"
"One. Do you play bridge?"
"No."
"Two. Do you play chess?"
"I can."
"Three. Do you play cricket? Not that it matters."
"Yes, I do sometimes. Good-bye. Send me a proof, will
you? By the way, what paper is this for?"
"The Sportsman, if you'll play. On Friday week. Do."
"Anything, if you'll go."
"May I have that in writing?"
He handed me a rejection form.
"There you are. And I'll do anything you like on Friday."
I went back to Henry and told him the good news.
"I wonder if he'll mind being black," said Henry. "That's
the chap that always gets mated so quickly."
"I expect they'll arrange it among themselves. Anyhow,
we've done our best for them."
"It's an awful business, getting up a team," said Henry
thoughtfully. "Well, we shall have two decent sets of bridge,
anyway. But you ought to have arranged for twelve aside,
and then we could have left out the chess professors and had
three sets."
"It's all the fault of the rules. Some day somebody will
realize that four doesn't go into eleven, and then we shall
have a new rule."
"No, I don't think so," said Henry. "I don't fancy
'Wanderer' would allow it."

III. IN THE TRAIN

If there is one thing I cannot stand, it is ingratitude. Take
the case of Carey. Carey, you may remember, professed
himself unable to play either bridge or chess; and as we had
a three-hour journey before us it did not look as though he
were going to have much of a time. However, Henry and I,
thinking entirely of Carey's personal comfort, went to the trouble of buying him a solitaire board, with glass balls complete. The balls were all in different colours.

I laid this before Carey as soon as we settled in the train.

"Whatever's that?"

"The new game," I said. "It's all the rage now, the man tells me. The Smart Set play it every Sunday. Young girls are inveigled into lonely country houses and robbed of incredible sums."

Carey laughed scornfully.

"So it is alleged," I added. "The inventor claims for it that in some respects it has advantages which even cricket cannot claim. As, for instance, it can be played in any weather; nay, even upon the sick bed."

"And how exactly is it played?"

"Thus. You take one away and all the rest jump over each other. At each jump you remove the jumpee, and the object is to clear the board. Hence the name—solitaire."

"I see. It seems a pretty rotten game."

That made me angry.

"All right. Then don't play. Have a game of marbles on the rack instead."

Meanwhile Henry was introducing Bolton and the editor to each other.

"Two such famous people," he began.

"Every one," said Bolton, with a bow, "knows the editor of——"

"Oh, yes, that's that. But I meant two such famous chess players. Bolton," he explained to the editor, "was twelfth man against Oxford some years ago. Something went wrong with his heart, or he'd have got in. On his day, and if the board was at all sticky, he used to turn a good deal from QB4."

"Do you really play?" asked Bolton eagerly. "I have a board here."

"Does he play! Do you mean to say you have never heard of the Trocadero Defence?"

"The Sicilian Defence——"

"The Trocadero Defence. It's where you palm the other man's queen when he's not looking. Most effective opening."

They both seemed keen on beginning, so Henry got out the cards for the rest of us.

I drew the younger journalist, against Henry and the senior stockbroker. Out of compliment to the journalist we arranged
to play half a crown a hundred, that being about the price
they pay him. I dealt, and a problem arose immediately.
Here it is.

"A deals and leaves it to his partner B, who goes No
Trumps. Y leads a small heart. B's hand consists of king and
three small diamonds, king and one other heart, king and three
small clubs, and three small spades. A plays the king from
Dummy, and Z puts on the ace. What should A do?"

Answer. Ring communication cord and ask guard to
remove B.

"Very well," I said to Dummy. "One thing's pretty
clear. You don't bowl to-day. Long-leg both ends is about
your mark. Somewhere where there's plenty of throwing to
do."

Later on, when I was Dummy, I strolled over to the chess
players.

"What's the ground like?" said the editor, as he finessed
a knight.

"Sporting. Distinctly sporting."

"Long grass all round, I suppose?"

"Oh, lord, no. The cows eat up all that."

"Do you mean to say the cows are allowed on the pitch?"

"Well, they don't put it that way, quite. The pitch is
allowed on the cows' pasture land."

"I suppose if we make a hundred we shall do well?" asked somebody.

"If we make fifty we shall declare," I said. "By Jove,
Bolton, that's a pretty smart move."

I may not know all the technical terms, but I do understand
the idea of chess. The editor was a pawn up and three to play,
and had just advanced his queen against Bolton's king, putting
on a lot of check side as it seemed to me. Of course, I expected
Bolton would have to retire his king; but not he! He laid a
stymie with his bishop, and it was the editor's queen that had
to withdraw. Yet Bolton was only spare man at Cambridge!

"I am not at all sure," I said, "that chess is not a finer game
even than solitaire."

"It's a finer game than cricket," said Bolton, putting his
bishop back in the slips again.

"No," said the editor. "Cricket is the finest game in the
world. For why? I will tell you."

"Thanks to the glorious uncertainty of our national pastime,"
began the journalist, from his next Monday's article.
"No, thanks to the fact that it is a game in which one can produce the maximum of effect with the minimum of skill. Take my own case. I am not a batsman, I shall never make ten runs in an innings, yet how few people realize that! I go in first wicket down, wearing my M.C.C. cap. Having taken guard with the help of a bail, I adopt Palairtet’s stance at the wicket. Then the bowler delivers; either to the off, to leg, or straight. If it is to the off, I should my bat and sneer at it. If it is to leg, I swing at it. I have a beautiful swing, which is alone worth the money. Probably I miss, but the bowler fully understands that it is because I have not yet got the pace of the wicket. Sooner or later he sends down a straight one, whereupon I proceed to glide it to leg. You will see the stroke in Beldam’s book. Of course, I miss the ball, and am given out l.b.w. Then the look of astonishment that passes over my face, the bewildered inquiry of the wicket-keeper, and finally the shrug of good-humoured resignation as I walk from the crease! Nine times out of ten square-leg asks the umpire what county I play for. That is cricket."

"Quite so," I said, when he had finished. "There’s only one flaw in it. That is that quite possibly you may have to go in last to-day. You’ll have to think of some other plan. Also on this wicket the ball always goes well over your head. You couldn’t be l.b.w. if you tried."

"Oh, but I do try."

"Yes. Well, you’ll find it difficult."

The editor sighed.

"Then I shall have to retire hurt," he said.

Bolton chuckled to himself.

"One never retires hurt at chess," he said, as he huffed the editor’s king. "Though once," he added proudly, "I sprained my hand, and had to make all my moves with the left one. Check."

The editor yawned, and looked out of the window.

"Are we nearly there?" he asked.

IV. IN THE FIELD

It is, I consider, the duty of a captain to consult the wishes of his team now and then, particularly when he is in command of such a heterogeneous collection of the professions as I was. I was watching a match at the Oval once, and at the end of an over Lees went up to Dalmeny, and had a few
words with him. Probably, I thought, he is telling him a good story that he heard at lunch; or, maybe, he is asking for the latest gossip from the Lobby. My neighbour, however, held other views.

"There," he said, "there's ole Walter Lees asking to be took off."

"Surely not," I answered. "Dalmeny had a telegram just now, and Lees is asking if it's the three-thirty winner."

Lees then began to bowl again.

"There you are," I said triumphantly, but my neighbour wouldn't hear of it.

"Ole Lees asked to be took off, and ole Dalmeny" (I forget how he pronounced it, but I know it was one of the wrong ways)—"ole Dalmeny told him he'd have to stick on a bit."

Now that made a great impression on me, and I agreed with my friend that Dalmeny was in the wrong.

"When I am captaining a team," I said, "and one of the bowlers wants to come off, I am always ready to meet him half-way, more than half-way. Better than that, if I have resolved upon any course of action, I always let my team know beforehand; and I listen to their objections in a fair-minded spirit."

It was in accordance with this rule of mine that I said casually, as we were changing, "If we win the toss I shall put them in."

There was a chorus of protest.

"That's right, go it," I said. "Henry objects because, as a first-class cricketer, he is afraid of what The Sportsman will say if we lose. The editor naturally objects—it ruins his chance of being mistaken for a county player if he has to field first. Bolton objects because heavy exercise on a hot day spoils his lunch. Thompson objects because that's the way he earns his living at the Bar. His objection is merely technical, and is reserved as a point of law for the Court of Crown Cases Reserved. Markham is a socialist and objects to authority. Also he knows he's got to field long-leg both ends. Gerald—"

"But why?" said Henry.

"Because I want you all to see the wicket first. Then you can't say you weren't warned." Whereupon I went out and lost the toss.

As we walked into the field the editor told me a very funny story. I cannot repeat it here for various reasons. First, it
has nothing to do with cricket; and, secondly, it is, I understand, coming out in his next number, and I should probably get into trouble. Also it is highly technical, and depends largely for its success upon adequate facial expression. But it amused me a good deal. Just as he got to the exciting part, Thompson came up.

"Do you mind if I go cover?" he asked.
"Do," I said abstractedly. "And what did the vicar say?"
The editor chuckled. "Well, you see, the vicar knowing, of course, that—"
"Cover, I suppose," said Gerald, as he caught us up.
"What? Oh yes, please. The vicar did know, did he?"
"Oh, the vicar knew. That's really the whole point."
I shouted with laughter.
"Good, isn't it?" said the editor. "Well, then—"
"Have you got a cover?" came Markham's voice from behind us.
I turned round.
"Oh, Markham," I said, "I shall want you cover, if you don't mind. Sorry—I must tell these men where to go—well, then. you were saying—"

The editor continued the story. We were interrupted once or twice, but he finished it just as their first two men came out. I particularly liked that bit about the—

"Jove," I said suddenly, "we haven't got a wicket-keeper. That's always the way. Can you keep?" I asked the editor.
"Isn't there anyone else?"
"I'm afraid they're all fielding cover," I said, remembering suddenly. "But, look here, it's the chance of a lifetime for you. You can tell 'em all that—"

But he was trotting off to the pavilion.
"Can anybody lend me some gloves?" he asked. "They want me to keep wicket. Thing I've never done in my life. Of course I always field cover in the ordinary way. Thanks awfully. Sure you don't mind? Don't suppose I shall stop a ball though."

"Henry," I called, "you're starting that end. Arrange the field, will you? I'll go cover. You're sure to want one."

Their first batsman was an old weather-beaten villager called George. We knew his name was George because the second ball struck him in the stomach and his partner said, "Stay there, George," which seemed to be George's idea too. We learnt at lunch that once, in the 'eighties or so, he had gone
in first with Lord Hawke (which put him on a level with that player), and that he had taken first ball (which put him just above the Yorkshireman).

There the story ended, so far as George was concerned; and indeed it was enough. Why seek to inquire if George took any other balls besides the first?

In our match, however, he took the second in the place that I mentioned, the third on the back of the neck, the fourth on the elbow, and the fifth in the original place; while the sixth, being off the wicket, was left there. Nearly every batsman had some pet stroke, and we soon saw that George's stroke was the leg-bye. His bat was the second line of defence, and was kept well in the block. If the ball escaped the earthwork in front, there was always a chance that it would be brought up by the bat. Once, indeed, a splendid ball of Henry's which came with his arm and missed George's legs, snicked the bat, and went straight into the wicket-keeper's hands. The editor, however, presented his compliments, and regretted that he was unable to accept the enclosed, which he accordingly returned with many thanks.

There was an unwritten law that George could not be l.b.w. I cannot say how it arose—possibly from a natural coyness on George's part about the exact significance of the "1." Henry, after appealing for the best part of three overs, gave it up, and bowled what he called "googlies" at him. This looked more hopeful, because a googly seems in no way to be restricted as to the number of its bounces, and at each bounce it had a chance of doing something. Unfortunately it never did George. Lunch came and the score was thirty-seven—George having compiled in two hours a masterly nineteen; eighteen off the person, but none the less directly due to him.

"We must think of a plan of campaign at lunch," said Henry. "It's hopeless to go on like this."

"Does George drink?" I asked anxiously. It seemed the only chance.

But George didn't. And the score was thirty-seven for five, which is a good score for the wicket.

V. AT THE WICKETS

At lunch I said: "I have just had a wire from the Surrey committee to say that I may put myself on to bowl."

"That is good hearing," said Henry.
"Did they hear?" asked Gerald anxiously, looking over at the Chartleigh team.

"You may think you're very funny, but I'll bet you a—a—anything you like that I get George out."

"All right," said Gerald. "I'll play you for second wicket down, the loser to go in last."

"Done," I said, "and what about passing the salad now?"

After lunch the editor took me on one side and said: "I don't like it. I don't like it at all."

"Then why did you have so much?" I asked.

"I mean the wicket. It's dangerous. I am not thinking of myself so much as of—"

"As of the reading public?"

"Quite so."

"You think you—you would be missed in Fleet Street—just at first?"

"You are not putting the facts too strongly. I was about to suggest that I should be a 'did not bat.'"

"Oh! I see. Perhaps I ought to tell you that I was talking just now to the sister of their captain."

The editor looked interested.

"About the pad of the gardener?" he said.

"About you. She said—I give you her own words—'Who is the tall, handsome man keeping wicket in a M.C.C. cap?'. So I said you were a well-known county player, as she would see when you went in to bat."

The editor shook my hand impressively.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I shall not fail her. What county did you say?"

"Part of Flint. You know the little bit that's got into the wrong county by mistake? That part. She had never heard of it; but I assured her it had a little bit of yellow all to itself on the map. Have you a pretty good eleven?"

The editor swore twice—once for me and once for Flint. Then we went out into the field.

My first ball did for George. I followed the tactics of William the First at the Battle of Hastings, 1066. You remember how he ordered his archers to shoot into the air, and how one arrow fell and pierced the eye of Harold, whereupon confusion and disaster arose. So with George. I hurled one perpendicularly into the sky, and it dropped (after a long time) straight upon the batsman. George followed it with a slightly contemptuous eye. . . . all the way. . . .
George followed it with a slightly contemptuous eye ... all the way.
All the way. Of course, I was sorry. We were all much distressed. They told us afterwards he had never been hit in the eye before. . . . One gets new experiences.

George retired hurt. Not so much hurt as piqued, I fancy. He told the umpire it wasn’t bowling. Possibly. Neither was it batting. It was just superior tactics.

The innings soon closed, and we had sixty-one to win, and, what seemed more likely, fifty-nine and various other numbers to lose. Sixty-one is a very unlucky number with me—oddly enough I have never yet made sixty-one; like W. G. Grace, who had never made ninety-three. My average this season is five, which is a respectable number. As Bolton pointed out—if we each got five to-day, and there were six extras, we should win. I suppose if one plays chess a good deal one thinks of these things.

Harold, I mean George, refused to field, so I nobly put myself in last and substituted for him. This was owing to an argument as to the exact wording of my bet with Gerald.

“You said you’d get him out,” said Gerald.

“I mean ‘out of the way,’ ‘out of the field,’ ‘out of—’”

“I meant ‘out’ according to the laws of cricket. There are nine ways. Which was yours, I should like to know?”

“Obstructing the ball.”

“There you are.”

I shifted my ground.

“I didn’t say I’d get him out,” I explained. “I said I’d get him. Those were my very words. ‘I will get George.’ Can you deny that I got him?”

“Even if you said that, which you didn’t, the common construction that one puts upon the phrase is—”

“If you are going to use long words like that,” I said, “I must refer you to my solicitor Bolton.”

Whereupon Bolton took counsel’s opinion, and reported that he could not advise me to proceed in the matter. So Gerald took second wicket, and I fielded.

However, one advantage of fielding was that I saw the editor’s innings from start to finish at the closest quarters. He came in at the end of the first over, and took guard for “left hand round the wicket.”

“Would you give it me?” he said to Bolton. “These country umpires. . . . Thanks. And what’s that over the wicket? Thanks.”

He marked two places with the bail.
"How about having it from here?" I suggested at mid-on.
"It's quite a good place and we're in a straight line with the
church."

The editor returned the bail, and held up his bat again.
"That 'one-leg' all right? Thanks."

He was proceeding to look round the field when a gentle
voice from behind him said: "If you wouldn't mind moving
a bit, sir, I could bowl."

"Oh, is it over?" said the editor airily, trying to hide his
confusion. "I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon."

Still he had certainly impressed the sister of their captain,
and it was dreadful to think of the disillusionment that might
follow at any moment. However, as it happened, he had yet
another trick up his sleeve. Bolton hit a ball to cover, and the
editor, in the words of the local paper, "most sportingly sacri-
ficed his wicket when he saw that his partner had not time to
get back. It was a question, however, whether there was ever
a run possible."

Which shows that the reporter did not know of the exist-
ence of their captain's sister.

When I came in, the score was fifty-one for nine, and Henry
was still in. I had only one ball to play, so I feel that I should
describe it in full. I have four good scoring strokes—the cut,
the drive, the hook, and the glance. As the bowler ran up to
the crease I decided to cut the ball to the ropes. Directly,
however, it left his hand, I saw that it was a ball to hook, and
accordingly I changed my attitude to the one usually adopted
for that stroke. But the ball came up farther than I expected,
so at the last moment I drove it hard past the bowler. That at
least was the idea. Actually, it turned out to be a beautiful
glance shot to the leg boundary. Seldom, if ever, has Beldam
had such an opportunity for four action photographs on one
plate.

Henry took a sixer next ball, and so we won. And the rest
of the story of my team, is it not written in the journals of The
Sportsman and The Chartleigh Watchman, and in the hearts of
all who were privileged to compose it? But how the editor
took two jokes I told him in the train, and put them in his
paper (as his own), and how Carey challenged the engine-driver
to an eighteen-hole solitaire match, and how . . . these things
indeed shall never be divulged.
EX NIHILO FIT MULTUM

I SHOULD like to explain just what happened to the ball. In the first place it was of an irreprouachable length, and broke very sharply and cleverly from the leg. (The bowler, I am sure, will bear me out in this.) Also it rose with great suddenness ... and, before I had time to perfect any adequate system of defence, took me on the knee and from there rolled on to the off-stump. There was a considerable amount of applause on the part of the field, due, no doubt, to the feeling that a dangerous batsman had been dismissed without scoring. I need hardly add that I did not resent this appreciation.

What I really wished to say to the wicket-keeper was (1) that it was the first fast wicket I had played on this summer; (2) that it was my first nought this season, and, hang it, even Fry made noughts sometimes; and (3) that personally I always felt that it didn't matter what one made oneself so long as one's side was victorious. What I actually said was shorter; but I expect the wicket-keeper understood just as well. He seemed an intelligent fellow.

After that, I walked nine miles back to the pavilion.

The next man was brushing his hair in the dressing-room.

What's happened?" he asked.

Nothing," I said truthfully.

But you're out, aren't you?"

I mean that nothing has eventuated—accrued, as it were."

Blob? Bad luck. Is my parting straight?"

It curls a bit from leg up at the top, but it will do. Mind you make some. I always feel that so long as one's side is victorious—"

But he was gone. I brushed my own hair very carefully, lit a cigarette, and went outside to the others. I always think that a nought itself is nothing—the way one carries it off is everything. A disaster, not only to himself but also to his side, should not make a man indifferent to his personal appearance.

"Bad luck," said somebody. "Did it come back?"

"Very quickly. We both did."

"He wasn't breaking much when I was in," said some tactless idiot.

"Then why did you get out?" I retorted.
"L.b.w."
I moved quickly away from him, and sat next to a man who had yet to go in.
"Bad luck," he said. "Second ball, wasn't it? I expect I shall do the same."
I thought for a moment.
"What makes you think you will have a second?" I asked.
"To judge from the easy way in which those two are knocking the bowling about, I shan't even have a first," he smiled.
I moved on again.
"Hallo," said a voice. "I saw you get out. How many did you make?"
"None," I said wearily.
"How many?"
I went and sat down next to him.
"Guess," I said.
"Oh, I can't."
"Well, think of a number."
"Yes."
"Double it. Divide by two. Take away the number you first thought of. What does that make?"
"A hundred."
"You must have done it wrong," I said suspiciously.
"No, I am sure I didn't... No, it still comes to a hundred."
"Well, then, I must have made a hundred," I said excitedly.
"Are you sure you haven't made a mistake?"
"Quite."
"Then I'd better go and tell the scorer. He put me down a blob—silly ass."
"He's a bad scorer, I know."
"By the way," I said, as I got up, "what number did you think of?"
"Well, it's like this. When you asked me to guess what you had made I instinctively thought of blob, only I didn't like to say so. Then when you began that number game I started with a hundred—it's such an easy number. Double—two hundred. Divided by two—one hundred. Take away the number you first thought of—that's blob, and you have a hundred left. Wasn't that right?"
"You idiot," I said angrily. "Of course it wasn't."
"Well, don't get sick about it. We all make mistakes."
"Sick, I'm not sick. Only just for the moment. . . . I really thought. . . . Well, I shall never be so near a century again."
At lunch I sat next to one of their side.
"How many did you make?" he asked.
"Not very many," I said.
"How many?"
"Oh, hardly any. None at all, practically."
"How many actually?"
"And actually," I said. ("Fool.")
After lunch a strange man happened to be talking to me.
"And why did you get out?" he asked.
It was a silly question and deserved a silly answer. Besides, I was sick of it all by this time.
"Point's moustache put me off," I said.
"What was wrong with Point's moustache?"
"It swerved the wrong way."
"I was fielding point," he said.
"I'm very sorry. But if you had recognized me, you wouldn't have asked why I got out, and if I had recognized you I shouldn't have told you. So let's forgive and forget."
I hoped that the subject was really closed this time. Of course, I knew that kind friends and relations would ask me on the morrow how many I had made, but for that day I wanted no more of it. Yet, as it happened, I reopened the subject myself.
For with five minutes to play their ninth wicket fell. Mid-off sauntered over towards me.
"Just as well we didn't stay in any longer."
"That's just what I thought," I said triumphantly, "all along."
THE HORSE
THAT DID NO WRONG

I had formed my own plan for the Easter Monday immediately following my promotion. I had a long talk over the matter weeks before with Mr. Percy Jennings, who teaches riding and driving, and lets out horses and vehicles.

He heard what I had got to say, and seemed respectful, but doubtful.

"Well, sir," he said, "things being as you say, if I might advise, I should think you'd better change your mind. Let me send you a nice comfortable victoria and one of my men to drive you, and then there can't be any mistake."

"I think not, Mr. Jennings," I said. "I want to drive myself and my wife in a dogcart to the Lion at Winthorpe; it would give me no pleasure to be driven. I know that my limited experience with—er—the humbler animal does not amount to very much, but I feel that I should be all right with a safe horse. You understand, a perfectly safe horse. I mean one that has no vice of any kind under any provocation, that does not require any looking after, and, if possible, an animal that is in the habit of going to and from the Lion, and knows the road thoroughly."

Mr. Percy Jennings sucked a straw thoughtfully.

"You're asking for miracles," he said, "but as it happens I've got just that miracle. Young horse—Tommy we call him. He's worth £60 of any man's money, and he's worth £80 to me in my business. In fact, if you offered me £80 for him now, I'd tell you to put your money back in your pocket. You see, I get gents here to learn, and when the beginners are beginning I take them out with Tommy to get confidence. Say it's an oldish gent who's never seen a horse before, and has
been told to ride by his doctor—first few times I put him up on Tommy. Say it's a nervous lady wants to start a governess cart, and don’t know how to drive—I starts her with Tommy. That horse has never done anything wrong, and never thought of doing anything wrong, since the day he was foaled. He couldn’t do wrong if you asked him, and he'll do anything else you ask. Why, the blooming horse would climb a tree if he thought I expected it of him. The very first day he was in the shafts I drove him straight to Winthorpe—and that’s a fact. No work comes amiss to him, nor nothing else, either. He’ll stand like a statue with his nose over a buzzing motor, or he’ll draw you twelve miles an hour without a whip. You can stop him with a thread, and turn him with just thinking about it. And he’s as pretty as he’s good. But——”

Mr. Jennings stopped short and shook his head.

"Well?" I said.

"But I don’t let that horse out to every chance comer to knock about as he pleases on the high roads on an Easter Monday."

"Now, Mr. Jennings," I said, "do I look like a man who would knock a horse about?"

"No," he said, "you don’t. If I may say it without offence, you’re the ignorant, nervous sort. And I’ve known them bring the horse and cart back safe when one of the rowdy lot, that think they know something, will get three-parts screwed, start racing, and go to glory. If I’d thought that you were one of the rowdy lot, I shouldn’t so much as have mentioned him to you. However, we can’t stop here talking all day. Set that horse towards Winthorpe, and he’ll go there and stop at the Lion—he’s used to it—if he’s not interfered with. Let him take his own pace up hill and down; he knows his business. And at night he’ll take you home all right if you let him alone. You taking all responsibility up to ten fivers, I might think about it."

Business was subsequently arranged on these terms.

Eliza has not, perhaps, what would be called a sunny disposition. I said in my nonchalant way that evening, as I stirred my cocoa:

"I’ve arranged about the Bank Holiday, Eliza. I’m going to tool you over in a high dogcart to Winthorpe. I understand they give you a decent dinner at the Lion. Then I shall tool you back at night—moonlight, you know.
Best horse in Jennings's stables—not let out as a general rule."

All she would say at first was that extravagance was never any pleasure to her, and she wondered what mother would say if she knew. But after a certain amount of argument on both sides, I said that of course I should expect to make up for it in other ways as far as possible, and she admitted that she might enjoy it.

"If," she added, "we ever get home alive."

"That will be all right," I said. "I shall not ask you to drive. That will be my province, and I am not entirely without experience."

During the next few days I talked over the details frequently. There is nothing like a thorough preparation for making a success. I also kept my eye open in the streets and made some useful notes with reference to—

(a) Getting into the dogcart;
(b) Position of the hands and expression of face when driving;
(c) Arrangement of the rug;
(d) Getting out of the dogcart.

I also read carefully in our public reading-room an interesting and instructive article on "How Race-horses are Trained." Its bearing on the subject was somewhat indirect, but I gathered from it the meaning of several phrases which had previously been something of a difficulty to me.

I may say at once that we reached the Lion at Winthorpe without any accident. There was one little contretemps, as the French would say. We happened to meet Miss Sakers—for which, in itself, I was not sorry. She bowed, and in raising my hat I fancy the reins got caught—I never quite understood how it happened—but the horse turned round. However, I got down, and put him back in the required direction. It was merely a mistake on the horse's part, and he showed no trace of obstinacy. I also dropped my whip once or twice, but there is always some boy to pick that up for you and glad to earn a few coppers. I could not, considering the circumstances, agree with Eliza that a halfpenny would have been sufficient. However, I was quite good-tempered about it—indeed, I felt in particularly high spirits. I was wearing a
straw hat for the first time that season—it was a last year’s hat, but Eliza had cleaned it with salts of lemon, so that really it was quite presentable. I also wore a black diagonal frockcoat and vest that I reserved for Sundays and similar occasions, and a pair of white flannel trousers and brown boots. The trousers were new and almost unnecessarily long and roomy. However, as Eliza pointed out at the time, that, of course, allows for shrinkage in the wash. My necktie was of white satin with sprigs of flowers embroidered in the natural colours—tasteful and, I think, uncommon. Eliza wore her mackintosh—rather against my wishes, as the day was quite fine. The general appearance of our turn-out gave me great satisfaction. I cannot help thinking that we made some impression on people that we met, and I amused myself with wondering what they thought I was.

The dinner at the Lion was good, though Eliza rather kicked at the price. I drank one pint of bitter at dinner, and no more. In the light of subsequent events the necessity of mentioning this will be apparent. The place was, unfortunately, rather crowded, and not entirely with the best class of people. There were too many Bank Holiday cyclists there for my taste. One gentleman entered into conversation with me on the subject of horses. He was an elderly man, and Eliza said afterwards that she did not like his eye. Personally I found him most civil, quite ready to listen to me and to take a word of advice. He said that he had seen me drive up, and had said to the landlord: “That man knows what he’s doing, anyhow.” He seemed quite surprised to hear that it was not my own horse, and said he supposed I was trying it.

“Well,” I said, “under certain circumstances I might buy him.”

Here Eliza drew in her breath hard and long through her nose. It is an unpleasant habit. She does it whenever I say or do anything that she dislikes. Yet I had kept strictly within the limits of truth. I have no doubt that if my income had justified it, I should have bought that horse. Indeed, as things turned out, I practically—but do not let me anticipate.

There is not very much to do at Winthorpe. We obtained permission from the proprietor to walk round the garden, but that took only three or four minutes. Then Eliza found out that there was a coconut shy in the village, and insisted on going to it. It was, perhaps, a little infra dig. (as they say), but I was in an easy temper after dinner, and let myself be
persuaded; also, there was nowhere else to go. Eliza won four coconuts, and seemed to enjoy it. I had rather the feeling of having left all that kind of thing behind me, myself, and said so.

Eliza and I decided almost unanimously for an early tea and a pleasant drive home to a quiet evening. The elderly gentleman joined us at tea and offered me brandy and soda-water at his expense.

"Thank you," I said, "but when I am going to handle the ribbons I like to keep my head as clear as possible."

He said that he thought I was right. He really made himself most useful and obliging when we were leaving. There was a good deal of confusion through so many vehicles being drawn up outside at the same time.

The return journey was a great surprise. I had expected that the horse going home would fly like the wind, and that I should have difficulty in holding him. It was not so at all. He seemed reluctant to start, and I could never get him beyond a very slow trot; three or four times he seemed on the point of stopping altogether. Mr. Percy Jennings had told me that I should never want the whip, but I felt constrained to make a moderate use of it, and, really, it seemed to cause no improvement at all. The farther we went the worse the horse got, till it seemed to be less trouble to let him walk, which I did. About a mile from home Eliza pointed out to me that the horse was going very much down on one side, and very much up on the other.

"Ah!" I said, "then he's gone lame. That accounts for everything. I shall have to blow Jennings up about this. Still, as it is a valuable animal, we perhaps had better get out and lead him the rest of the way. Personally, I shall be glad to stretch my legs."

Eliza, who is, perhaps, a little inclined to grumble at every trifle, said that anything was better than some kinds of driving, and joined me in the road. We walked slowly back, and had to put up with many silly, and even personal, remarks from those who met us. Some of them whistled the "Dead March," which was not only quite inappropriate, but, in my opinion, actually blasphemous. I suppose one must not expect the best taste from these Bank Holiday crowds. I made no reply. I could have said a good deal, but, being with a lady, I wished to avoid any fracas.

Eliza left me when we reached our house. She said that I
could take the horse and cart back to the yard while she went in and helped the girl to get supper.

Mr. Percy Jennings was standing in the yard when I led the horse in.

"What's all this?" he said.

"That's what I want to know," I replied rather sharply. "This horse that you made so much fuss about was not fit for work. He's dead lame. No fault of ours. I can assure you we—"

"Oh, shut up!" he said offensively. Then he called "Jim!" and some kind of ostler person appeared.

He gave Jim some orders, and I heard enough to realize what had happened. Jim was to ride off at once to the Lion at Winthorpe and bring Tommy back if he was still in the stables there. If not, he was to find out where the horse had gone and follow him up, let the police know, and not come back without him. Neither of them took the least notice of me. I did put in a question once or twice, but they went on just as if I had never spoken at all. I am not the man to put up with disrespect. I was much annoyed. As soon as Jim had gone off, I said:

"And now, perhaps, you can give me a few minutes of your attention, Mr. Jennings. It seems through some mistake on the part of the stable people at the Lion I have brought back the wrong horse. Naturally, I disclaim all responsibility for their blunder."

"Oh, go away!" said Mr. Jennings. "I'll talk to you when you're sober."

"I am perfectly sober, and I'll thank you not to venture to dare to—"

"Then, if you're sober—and I don't say you are, but if you are—you must be a bigger fool than ever I took you for. You drive out my best horse, worth a hundred and twenty to me, and you bring back this dying cripple, worth what the knacker will give for him to-morrow. I tell you if I don't get my own horse back you'll have to pay that fifty. I've got your name and address, and your employer's name and address; and that won't half make it up to me. Worst day's work I've ever done, this is. Oh, don't stand gaping there! Get out of the yard! Get out of my sight!"

I have not reported this speech exactly as it was spoken. Before every noun a certain adjective—always the same—was inserted. I have omitted that adjective.
"I am extremely sorry for the error," I said with dignity. He said that he didn't want my (same adjective) sorrow. "But in future," I continued, "all communications between us must be through our respective solicitors."

I rather wish now that I had not said that. The horse was never recovered, and my solicitor could only get the claim down to £34 (£10 cash, and the rest in weekly instalments). I feel that I could have done as much as that myself; and as it was I had to pay the solicitor.

But at the time my blood was up, and I did not very much care what I said—as long as it showed him that I was not to be played with.

Mr. Jennings then made a remark about our respective solicitors which cannot be further particularized.

I, personally, simply swung round on my heel and walked right out of the yard.

I am willing to admit that I had some apprehensions as to the way in which Eliza would take this. In one way she took it far better than I expected.

Let me take an instance. A few days before, being in a playful mood, I sprang out at her from behind a door in order to make her jump. She did jump—and so far I suppose the thing was a success. But she also dropped and broke a vase—a pretty little thing, representing a boot, with maidenhair fern growing over it. She quite lost her temper, and said things which I trust and believe she regretted afterwards.

But now, when the loss was far more considerable, she was much quieter. It would be idle to say that she was cheerful about it, but she never once said it was all my fault. On the contrary, she said it was all her own fault—because she had known all along I had got the wrong horse, but she said nothing about it because she knew that she knew nothing about horses.

I thought she was wrong in saying that the man who stole our horse was the elderly man who had entered into conversa-
tion with me, and made himself so pleasant, and that he had done his utmost to bustle us and confuse us when we were leaving the hotel.

But I did not argue the point. I did not feel much like arguing about anything. One of my favourite hymns points out that the roseate hues of early dawn vanish far more quickly than a beginner might suppose. So it had been with my increasing income. What with the extra expenses that we
had already incurred and this serious blow, we were now in much the same position that we had been the year before.

I paid the £10 in cash to Mr. Jennings at once. The solicitor thought it would be better. Fortunately, I had some money in hand at the time. And the balance, £8 15s., I borrowed from Eliza’s mother. There is one drop of sugar in the darkest cloud—I found an opportunity to sell the flannel trousers at very little under cost.
PIPE IN ARCADY

I hardly can bring myself to part with this story, it has been such a private joy to me. Moreover, that I have lain awake in the night to laugh over it is no guarantee of your being passably amused. Yourselves, I dare say, have known what it is to awake in irrepressible mirth from a dream which next morning proved to be flat and unconvincing. Well, this my pet story has some of the qualities of a dream; being absurd, for instance, and almost incredible, and even a trifle inhuman. After all, I had better change my mind, and tell you another—

But no; I will risk it, and you shall have it, just as it befell.

I had taken an afternoon’s holiday to make a pilgrimage: my goal being a small parish church that lies remote from the railway, five good miles from the tiniest of country stations; my purpose to inspect—or say, rather, to contemplate—a Norman porch, for which it ought to be widely famous. (Here let me say that I have an unlearned passion for Norman architecture—to enjoy it merely, not to write about it.)

To carry me on my first stage I had taken a crawling local train that dodged its way somehow between the regular expresses and the “excursions” that invade our Delectable Duchy from June to October. The season was high midsummer, the afternoon hot and drowsy with scents of mown hay; and between the rattle of the fast trains it seemed that we, native denizens of the Duchy, careless of observation or applause, were executing a tour de force in that fine indolence which had been charged as a fault against us. That we halted at every station goes without saying. Few sidings—however inconsiderable or, as it might seem, fortuitous—escaped the
flattery of our prolonged sojourn. We ambled, we paused, almost we dallied with the butterflies afloat over the meadow-sweet and cow-parsley beside the line; we exchanged gossip with stationmasters, and received the congratulations of signal-men on the extraordinary spell of fine weather. It did not matter. Three market-women, a pedlar, and a local policeman made up with me the train's complement of passengers. I gathered that their business could wait; and as for mine—well, a Norman porch is by this time accustomed to waiting.

I will not deny that in the end I dozed at intervals in my empty smoking compartment; but wish to make it clear that I came on the vision (as I will call it) with eyes open, and that it left me staring, wide-awake as Macbeth.

Let me describe it. To the left of the line as you travel westward there lies a long grassy meadow on a gentle acclivity, set with three or four umbrageous oaks and backed by a steep plantation of oak saplings. At the foot of the meadow, close alongside the line, runs a brook, which is met at the meadow's end by a second brook which crosses under the permanent way through a culvert. The united waters continue the course of the first brook, beside the line, and maybe for half a mile farther; but, a few yards below their junction, are dammed by the masonry of a bridge over which a country lane crosses the railway; and this obstacle spreads them into a pool some fifteen or twenty feet wide, overgrown with the leaves of the arrow-head, and fringed with water-flags and the flowering rush.

Now I seldom pass this spot without sparing a glance for it; first because of the pool's still beauty, and secondly because many rabbits infest the meadow below the coppice, and among them for two or three years was a black fellow whom I took an idle delight in recognising. (He is gone now, and his place knows him no more; yet I continue to hope for sight of a black rabbit just there.) But this afternoon I looked out with special interest because, happening to pass down the line two days before, I had noted a gang of navvies at work on the culvert; and among them, as they stood aside to let the train pass, I had recognised my friend Joby Tucker, their ganger, and an excellent fellow to boot.

Therefore my eyes were alert as we approached the curve that opens the meadow into view, and—as I am a Christian man, living in the twentieth century—I saw this vision: I beheld beneath the shade of the midmost oak eight men sitting
stark naked, whereof one blew on a flute, one played a concertina, and the rest beat their palms together, marking the time; while before them, in couples on the sward, my gang of navvies rotated in a clumsy waltz, watched by a ring of solemn ruminant kine!

I saw it. The whole scene, barring the concertina and the navvies’ clothes, might have been transformed straight from a Greek vase of the best period. Here, in this green corner of rural England, on a workaday afternoon (a Wednesday, to be precise), in full sunlight, I saw this company of the early gods sitting, naked and unabashed, and piping, while twelve British navvies danced to their music... I saw it; and a censorious whistle from the engine told me that driver and stoker saw it too. I was not dreaming then. But what on earth could it mean? For fifteen seconds or so I stared at the vision... and so the train joggled past it and rapt it from my eyes.

I can understand now the ancient stories of men who, having by hap surprised the goddesses bathing, never recovered from the shock but thereafter ran wild in the woods with their memories.

At the next station I alighted. It chanced to be the station for which I had taken my ticket; but anyhow I should have alighted there. The spell of the vision was upon me. The Norman porch might wait. It is (as I have said) used to waiting, and in fact it has waited. I have not yet made another holiday to visit it. Whether or no the market-women and the local policeman had beheld, I know not. I hope not, but now shall never know... The engine-driver, leaning in converse with the stationmaster, and jerking a thumb backward, had certainly beheld. But I passed him with averted eyes, gave up my ticket, and struck straight across country for the spot.

I came to it, as my watch told me, at twenty minutes after five. The afternoon sunlight still lay broad on the meadow. The place was unchanged save for a lengthening of its oak-tree shadows. But the persons of my vision—naked gods and navvies—had vanished. Only the cattle stood, knee-deep in the pool, lazily swishing their tails in protest against the flies; and the cattle could tell me nothing.

Just a fortnight later, as I spent at St. Blazey junction the forty odd minutes of repentance ever thoughtfully pro-
vided by our railway company for those who, living in Troy, are foolish enough to travel, I spied at some distance below the station a gang of men engaged in unloading rubble to construct a new siding for the clay-traffic, and at their head my friend Mr. Joby Tucker. The railway company was consuming so much of my time that I felt no qualms in returning some part of the compliment, and strolled down the line to wish Mr. Tucker good-day. "And, by the bye," I added, "you owe me an explanation. What on earth were you doing in Treba meadow two Wednesdays ago—you and your naked friends?"

Joby leaned on his measuring rod and grinned from ear to ear.

"You see'd us?" he asked, and, letting his eyes travel along the line, he chuckled to himself softly and at length. "Well, now, I'm glad o' that. 'Fact is, I've been savin' up to tell 'ee about it, but (thinks I) when I tells Mr. Q. he won't never believe."

"I certainly saw you," I answered; "but as for believing—"

"Iss, iss," he interrupted, with fresh chucklings; "a fair knock-out, wasn' it? . . . You see, they was blind—poor fellas!"

"Drink?"

"No, sir—blind—'pity the pore blind'; three-parts blind, anyways, an' undergoin' treatment for it."

"Nice sort of treatment!"

"Eh? You don't understand. See'd us from the train, did 'ee? Which train?"

"The 1.35 ex Millbay."

"Wish I'd a-knowned you was watching us. I'd ha' waved my hat as you went by, or maybe blowed 'ee a kiss—that bein' properer to the occasion, come to think."

Joby paused, drew the back of a hand across his laughtermoistened eyes, and pulled himself together, steadying his voice for the story.

"I'll tell 'ee what happened, from the beginnin'. A gang of us had been sent down, two days before, to Treba meadow, to repair the culvert there. Soon as we started to work we found the whole masonry fairly rotten, and spent the first afternoon (that was Monday) underpinnin', while I traced out the extent o' the damage. The farther I went, the worse I
found it; the main mischief bein' a leak about midway in the culvert, on the down side; whereby the water, percolatin' through, was unpackin' the soil, not only behind the masonry of the culvert, but right away down for twenty yards and more behind the stone-facing where the line runs alongside the pool. All this we were forced to take down, shorein' as we went, till we cut back pretty close to the rails. The job, you see, had turned out more serious than reported; and havin' no one to consult, I kept the men at it.

"By Wednesday noon we had cut back so far as we needed, shorein' very careful as we went, and the men workin' away cheerful, with the footboards of the expresses whizzin' by close over their heads, so's it felt like havin' your hair brushed by machinery. By the time we knocked off for dinner I felt pretty easy in mind, knowin' we'd broke the back o' the job.

"Well, we touched pipe and started again. Bein' so close to the line I'd posted a fella with a flag—Bill Martin it was—to keep a look-out for the down-trains; an' about three o'clock or a little after he whistled one comin'. I happened to be in the culvert at the time, but stepped out an' back across the brook, just to fling an eye along the embankment to see that all was clear. Clear it was, an' therefore it surprised me a bit, as the train hove in sight around the curve, to see that she had her brakes on, hard, and was slowin' down to stop. My first thought was that Bill Martin must have taken some scare an' showed her the red flag. But that was a mistake; besides she must have started the brakes before openin' sight on Bill."

"Then why on earth was she pulling up?" I asked. "It couldn't be signals."

"There ain't no signal within a mile of Treba meadow, up or down. She was stoppin' because—but just you let me tell it in my own way. Along she came, draggin' hard on her brakes an' whistlin'. I knew her for an excursion, and as she passed I sized it up for a big school-treat. There was five coaches, mostly packed with children, an' on one o' the coaches was a board—'Exeter to Penzance.' The four front coaches had corridors, the tail one just ordinary compartments.

"Well, she dragged past us to dead-slow, an' came to a standstill with her tail coach about thirty yards beyond where I stood, and, as you might say, with its footboard right overhangin' the pool. You mayn't remember it, but the line just there curves pretty sharp to the right, and when she pulled up, the tail coach pretty well hid the rest o' the train from us.
Five or six men, hearin' the brakes, had followed me out of the culvert and stood by me, wonderin' why the stoppage was. The rest were dotted about along the slope of th' embankment. And then the curiosest thing happened—about the curiosest thing I seen in all my years on the line. A door of the tail coach opened and a man stepped out. He didn' jump out, you understand, nor fling hisself out; he just stepped out into air, and with that his arms and legs cast themselves anyways an' he went down sprawlin' into the pool. It's easy to say we ought t' have run then an' there an' rescued 'im; but for the moment it stuck us up starin' an'—Wait a bit. You ha'n't heard the end.

"I hadn't fairly caught my breath, before another man stepped out! He put his foot down upon nothing, same as the first, overbalanced just the same, and shot after him base-over-top into the water.

"Close 'pon the second man's heels appeared a third... Yes, sir, I know now what a woman feels like when she's goin' to have the scritches.¹ I'd have asked someone to pinch me in the fleshy part o' the leg, to make sure I was alive an' awake, but the power o' speech was taken from us. We just stuck an' stared.

"What beat everything was the behaviour of the train, so to say. There it stood, like as if it'd pulled up alongside the pool for the very purpose to unload these unfortnit' men; an' yet takin' no notice whatever. Not a sign o' the guard—not a head poked out anywheres in the line o' windows—only the sun shinin', an' the steam escapin', an' out o' the rear compartment this procession droppin' out an' high-divin' one after another.

"Eight of 'em! Eight, as I am a truth-speakin' man—but there! you saw 'em with your own eyes. Eight, and the last of the eight scarce in the water afore the engine toots her whistle an' the train starts on again, round the curve an' out o' sight.

"She didn' leave us no time to doubt, neither, for there the poor fellas were, splashin' an' blowin', some of 'em bleatin' for help, an' gurglin', an' for aught we know drownin' in three to four feet o' water. So we pulled ourselves together an' ran to give 'em first-aid.

"It didn' take us long to haul the whole lot out and ashore; and, as Providence would have it, not a bone broken in the

¹ Hysterics.
party. One or two were sufferin' from sprains, and all of 'em
from shock (but so were we, for that matter), and between 'em
they must ha' swallowed a bra' few pints o' water, an' muddy
water at that. I can't tell czackly when or how we discovered
they was all blind, or near-upon blind. It may ha' been from
the unhandiness of their movements an' the way they clutched
at us an' at one another as we pulled 'em ashore. Hows'ever,
blind they were; an' I don't remember that it struck us as
anyways singular, after what we'd been through a'ready. We
fished out a concertina, too, an' a silver-mounted flute that
was bobbin' among the weeds.

"The man the concertina belonged to—a tall fresh-com-
plexioned young fella he was, an' very mild of manner—
turned out to be a sort o' leader o' the party; an' he was the
first to talk any sense. 'Th-thank you,' he said. 'They told
us Penzance was the next stop.'

"'Hey?' says I.

"'They told us,' he says again, plaintive-like, feelin' for
his spectacles an' not finding 'em, 'that Penzance was the next
stop.'

"'Bound for Penzance, was you?' I asks.

"'For the Land's End,' says he, his teeth chatterin'. I
set it down the man had a stammer, but 'twas only the shock
an' the chill of his duckin'.

"'Well,' says I, 'this ain't the Land's End, though I
dessay it feels like it. Then you wasn't thrown out?' I says.

"'Th-thrown out?' say he. 'N-no. They told us
Penzance was the next stop.'

"'Then,' says I, 'if you got out accidental you've had
a most providential escape, an' me an' my mates don't deserve
less than to hear about it. There's bound to be inquiries
after you when the guard finds your compartment empty an'
the door open. May be the train'll put back; more likely
they'll send a search party; but anyways you're all wet through,
an' the best thing for health is to off wi' your clothes an' dry
'em this warm afternoon.'

"'I dessay,' says he, 'you'll have noticed that our eyesight
is affected.'

"'All the better if you're anyways modest,' says I. 'You
couldn't find a retiredder place than this—not if you searched:
an' we don't mind.'

"Well, sir, the end was we stripped 'em naked as Adam,
an' spread their clothes to dry 'pon the grass. While we
tended on ’em the mild young man told us how it had happened. It seems they’d come by excursion from Exeter. There’s a blind home at Exeter, an’ likewise a cathedral choir, an’ Sunday school, an’ a boys’ brigade, with other sundries; an’ this year the good people financin’ half-a-dozen o’ these shows had discovered that by clubbin’ two sixpences together a shillin’ could be made to go as far as eighteenpence; and how, doin’ it on the co-op’ instead of an afternoon treat for each, they could manage a two days’ outin’ for all—Exeter to Penzance an’ the Land’s End, sleepin’ one night at Penzance, an’ back to Exeter at some ungodly hour the next. It’s no use your askin’ me why a man three-parts blind should want to visit the Land’s End. There’s an attraction about that place, an’ that’s all you can say. Everybody knows as ’tisn’ worth seein’, an’ yet everybody wants to see it—so why not a blind man?

“Well, this Happy Holiday Committee (as they called themselves) got the Company to fix them up with a special excursion; an’ our blind friends—bein’ sensitive, or maybe a touch above mixin’ wi’ the school children an’ infants—had packed themselves into this rear compartment separate from the others. One of ’em had brought his concertina, an’ another his flute, and what with these an’ other ways of passin’ the time they got along pretty comfortable till they came to Gwinear Road: an’ there for some reason they were held up an’ had to show their tickets. Anyways, the staff at Gwinear Road went along the train collectin’ the halves o’ their return tickets. ’What’s the name o’ this station?’ asks my blind friend, very mild an’ polite. ’Gwinear Road,’ answers the porter; ’Penzance next stop.’ Somehow this gave him the notion that they were nearly arrived, an’ so, you see, when the train slowed down a few minutes later an’ came to a stop, he took the porter at his word, an’ stepped out. Simple, wasn’t it? But in my experience the curiosest things in life are the simplest of all, once you come to inquire into ’em.”

“What I don’t understand,” said I, “is how the train came to stop just there.”

Mr. Tucker gazed at me rather in sorrow than in anger. “I thought,” said he, “’twas agreed I should tell the story in my own way. Well, as I was sayin’, we got those poor fellas there, all as naked as Adam, an’ we was helpin’ them all we could—some of us wrin’gin’ out their under linen an’ spreading it to dry, others collectin’ their hats, an’ tryin’ which fitted which, an’ others even dredgin’ the pool for their hand-
bags an' spectacles an' other small articles, an' in the middle of it someone started to laugh. You'll scarce believe it, but up to that moment there hadn't been so much as a smile to hand round; an' to this day I don't know the man's name that started it—for all I can tell you, I did it myself. But this I do know that it yoicked the whole gang up like a motor-engine. There was a sort of 'click,' an' the next moment—

"Laugh? I never heard men laugh like it in my born days. Sort of recoil, I s'pose it must ha' been, after the shock. Laugh? There was men staggerin' drunk with it and there was men rollin' on the turf with it; an' there was men cryin' with it, holdin' on to a stitch in their sides an' beseechin' everyone also to hold hard. The blind men took a bit longer to get going; but by gosh, sir! once started they laughed to do your heart good. O Lord, O Lord! I wish you could ha' seen that mild-mannered spokesman. Somebody had fished out his spectacles for 'en, and that was all the clothing he stood in—that, an' a grin. He fairly beamed; an' the more he beamed the more we rocked, callin' on 'en to take pity an' stop it.

"Soon as I could catch a bit o' breath, 'Land's End next stop!' gasped I. 'O, but this is the Land's End! This is what the Land's End oughter been all the time, an' never was yet. O, for the Lord's sake,' says I, 'stop beamin', and pick up your concertina an' pitch us a tune!'

"Well, he did too. He played us 'Home, sweet home' first of all—'mid pleasure an' palaces—an' the rest o' the young men sat around 'en an' started clappin' their hands to the tune; an' then some fool slipped an arm round my waist. I'm only thankful he didn't kiss me. Didn't think of it, perhaps; couldn't ha' been that he wasn't capable. It must ha' been just then your train came along. An' about twenty minutes later, when we was gettin' our friends back into their outfits, we heard the search-engine about half a mile below, whistlin' an' feelin' its way up very cautious towards us.

"They was sun-dried an' jolly as sandhoppers—all their eight of 'em—as we helped 'em on board an' wished 'em ta-ta! The search party couldn' understand at all what had happened—in so short a time, too—to make us so cordial; an' somehow we didn' explain—neither we nor the blind men. I reckon the whole business had been so loonatic we felt it kind of holy. But the poor fellas kept wavin' back to us as they went out o' sight around the curve, an' maybe for a mile beyond. I never
heard," Mr. Tucker wound up meditatively, "if they ever reached the Land's End . . . I wonder?"

"But, excuse me once more," said I. "How came the train to stop as it did?"

"To be sure. I said just now that the curiousest things in life were, gen'rally speakin', the simplest. One o' the schoolchildren in the fore part of the train—a small nipper of nine—had put his head out o' the carriage window and got his cap blown away. That's all. Bein' a nipper of some resource, he wasted no time, but touched off the communicatin' button an' fetched the whole train to a standstill. George Simmons, the guard, told me all about it last week, when I happened across him an' asked the same question you've been askin'. George was huntin' through the corridors to find out what had gone wrong; that's how the blind men stepped out without his noticin'. He pretended to be pretty angry wi' the young tacker. 'Do 'ee know,' says George, 'it's a five pound fine if you stop a train without good reason?' 'But I had a good reason,' says the child. 'My mother gave 'levenpence for that cap, an' it's a bran' new one.'"
THE CELEBRATED JUMPING FROG
OF CALAVERAS COUNTY

IN compliance with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and inquired after my friend’s friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. I have a lurking suspicion that Leonidas W. Smiley is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that, if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamou Jim Smiley, and he would go to work and bore me nearly to death with some infernal reminiscence of him as long and tedious as it should be useless for me. If that was the design, it certainly succeeded.

I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably by the bar-room stove of the old, dilapidated tavern in the ancient mining camp of Angel’s, and I noticed that he was fat and bald-headed, and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity upon his tranquil countenance. He roused up and gave me good-day. I told him a friend of mine had commissioned me to make some inquiries about a cherished companion of his boyhood named Leonidas W. Smiley—Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley—a young minister of the Gospel, who he had heard was at one time a resident of Angel’s Camp. I added that, if Mr. Wheeler could tell me anything about this Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, I would feel under many obligations to him.

Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner and blockaded me there with his chair, and then sat me down and reeled off the monotonous narrative which follows this paragraph. He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned the initial
sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that, so far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in *finesse*. To me the spectacle of a man drifting serenely along through such a queer yarn without ever smiling was exquisitely absurd. As I said before, I asked him to tell me what he knew of Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, and he replied as follows. I let him go on in his own way, and never interrupted him once:

There was a feller here once by the name of *Jim* Smiley, in the winter of ’49—or may be it was the spring of ’50—I don’t recollect exactly, somehow, though what makes me think it was one or the other is because I remember the big flume wasn’t finished when he first came to the camp; but any way he was the curiosest man about, always betting on anything that turned up you ever see, if he could get anybody to bet on the other side; and if he couldn’t, he’d change sides. Any way that suited the other man would suit him—any way just so’s he got a bet, *he* was satisfied. But still he was lucky, uncommon lucky; he most always come out winner. He was always ready and laying for a chance; there couldn’t be no solitry thing mentioned but that feller’d offer to bet on it, and take any side you please, as I was just telling you. If there was a horse-race, you’d find him flush, or you’d find him busted at the end of it; if there was a dog-fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a cat-fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a chicken-fight, he’d bet on it; why, if there was two birds sitting on a fence, he would bet you which one would fly first; or if there was a camp-meeting, he would be there reg’lar, to bet on Parson Walker, which he judged to be the best exhorter about here, and so he was, too, and a good man. If he even seen a straddle-bug start to go anywheres, he would bet you how long it would take him to get wherever he was going to, and if you took him up, he would foller that straddle-bug to Mexico but what he would find out where he was bound for and how long he was on the road. Lots of the boys here has seen that Smiley, and can tell you about him. Why, it never made no difference to *him*—he would bet on *any* thing—the dangdest feller. Parson Walker’s wife laid very sick once, for a good while, and it seemed as if they warn’t going to save her;
but one morning he come in, and Smiley asked how she was, and he said she was considerable better—thank the Lord for His inf'nit mercy—and coming on so smart that, with the blessing of Prov'dence, she'd get well yet; and Smiley, before he thought, says, "Well, I'll risk two-and-a-half that she don't, anyway."

This-yer Smiley had a mare—the boys called her the fifteen-minute nag, but that was only in fun, you know, because, of course, she was faster than that—and he used to win money on that horse, for all she was so slow and always had the asthma, or the distemper, or the consumption, or something of that kind. They used to give her two or three hundred yards' start, and then pass her under way; but always at the fag-cnd of the race she'd get excited and desperate-like, and come cavorting and straddling up, and scattering her legs around limber, sometimes in the air, and sometimes out to one side amongst the fences, and kicking up m-o-r-e dust, and raising m-o-r-e racket with her coughing and sneezing and blowing her nose—and always fetch up at the stand just about a neck ahead, as near as you could cipher it down.

And he had a little small bull pup, that to look at him you'd think he wasn't worth a cent, but to set around and look ornery, and lay for a chance to steal something. But as soon as the money was up on him, he was a different dog; his under-jaw'd begin to stick out like the fo'castle of a steamboat, and his teeth would uncover, and shine savage like the furnaces. And a dog might tackle him, and bully-rag him, and bite him, and throw him over his shoulder two or three times, and Andrew Jackson—which was the name of the pup—Andrew Jackson would never let on but what he was satisfied, and hadn't expected nothing else—and the bets being doubled and doubled on the other side all the time, till the money was all up; and then all of a sudden he would grab that other dog jest by the j'int of his hind leg and freeze to it—not chaw, you understand, but only jest grip and hang on till they threwed up the sponge, if it was a year. Smiley always come out winner on that pup, till he harnessed a dog once that didn't have no hind legs, because they'd been sawed off by a circular saw, and when the thing had gone along far enough, and the money was all up, and he come to make a snatch for his pet holt, he saw in a minute how he'd been imposed on, and how the other dog had him in the door, so to speak, and he 'peared surprised, and then he looked sorter discouraged-like, and
didn’t try no more to win the fight, and so he got shucked out bad. He give Smiley a look, as much as to say his heart was broke, and it was his fault, for putting up a dog that hadn’t no hind legs for him to take holt of, which was his main dependence in a fight, and then he limped off a piece and laid down and died. It was a good pup, was that Andrew Jackson, and would have made a name for hisself if he’d lived, for the stuff was in him, and he had genius—I know it, because he hadn’t had no opportunities to speak of, and it don’t stand to reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances, if he hadn’t no talent. It always makes me feel sorry when I think of that last fight of his’n, and the way it turned out.

Well, this-yer Smiley had rat-tarriers, and chicken cocks, and tomcats, and all them kind of things, till you couldn’t rest, and you couldn’t fetch nothing for him to bet on but he’d match you. He ketched a frog one day, and took him home, and said he cal’klated to edercate him; and so he never done nothing for three months but set in his back yard and learn that frog to jump. And you bet you he did learn him, too. He’d give him a little punch behind, and the next minute you’d see that frog whirling in the air like a doughnut—see him turn one somerset, or may be a couple, if he got a good start, and come down flat-footed and all right, like a cat. He got him up so in the matter of catching flies, and kept him in practice so constant, that he’d nail a fly every time as far as he could see him. Smiley said all a frog wanted was education, and he could do most anything—and I believe him. Why, I’ve seen him set Dan’l Webster down here on this floor—Dan’l Webster was the name of the frog—and sing out, “Flies, Dan’l, flies!” and quicker’n you could wink, he’s spring straight up, and snake a fly off’n the counter there, and flop down on the floor again as solid as a gob of mud, and fall to scratching the side of his head with his hind foot as indifferent as if he hadn’t no idea he’d been doin’ any more’n any frog might do. You never see a frog so modest and straight for’ard as he was, for all he was so gifted. And when it come to fair and square jumping on a dead level, he could get over more ground at one straddle than any animal of his breed you ever see. Jumping on a dead level was his strong suit, you understand; and when it come to that, Smiley would ante up money on him as long as he had a red. Smiley was monstrous proud of his frog, and well he might be, for fellers that had
travelled and been everywheres, all said he laid over any frog that ever they see.

Well, Smiley kept the beast in a little lattice box, and he used to fetch him down town sometimes and lay for a bet. One day a feller—a stranger in the camp, he was—come across him with his box, and says:

"What might it be that you've got in the box?"

And Smiley says, sorter indifferent like, "It might be a parrot, or it might be a canary, may be, but it ain't—it's only just a frog."

And the feller took it, and looked at it careful, and turned it round this way and that, and says, "H'm, so 'tis. Well, what's he good for?"

"Well," Smiley says, easy and careless, "he's good enough for one thing, I should judge—he can out-jump any frog in Calaveras county."

The feller took the box again, and took another long, particular look, and gave it back to Smiley, and says, very deliberate, "Well, I don't see no p'ints about that frog that's any better'n any other frog."

"May be you don't," Smiley says. "May be you understand frogs, and may be you don't understand 'em; may be you've had experience, and may be you ain't, only a amateur, as it were. Any ways, I've got my opinion, and I'll risk forty dollars that he can out-jump any frog in Calaveras county."

And the feller studied a minute, and then says, kinder sad like, "Well, I'm only a stranger here, and I ain't got no frog; but if I had a frog, I'd bet you."

And then Smiley says, "That's all right—that's all right—if you'll hold my box a minute, I'll go and get you a frog." And so the feller took the box, and put up his forty dollars along with Smiley's and set down to wait.

So he set there a good while thinking and thinking to hisself, and then he got the frog out and prized his mouth open and took a teaspoon and filled him full of quail shot—filled him pretty near up to his chin—and set him on the floor. Smiley he went to the swamp and slopped around in the mud for a long time, and finally he ketched a frog, and fetched him in, and give him to this feller, and says:

"Now, if you're ready, set him alongside of Dan'l, with his forepaws just even with Dan'l, and I'll give the word." Then he says, "One—two—three—jump!" and him and the feller touched up the frogs from behind, and the new frog
hopped off, but Dan’l give a heave, and hysted up his shoulders
—so—like a Frenchman, but it wan’t no use—he couldn’t
budge; he was planted as solid as an anvil, and he couldn’t no
more stir than if he was anchored out. Smiley was a good
deal surprised, and he was disgusted too, but he didn’t have
no idea what the matter was, of course.

The feller took the money and started away; and when
he was going out at the door, he sorter jerked his thumb over
his shoulders—this way—at Dan’l, and says again, very
deliberate, “Well, I don’t see no p’ints about that frog that’s
any better’n any other frog.”

Smiley he stood scratching his head and looking down at
Dan’l a long time, and at last he says, “I do wonder what in
the nation that frog throw’d off for—I wonder if there ain’t
something the matter with him—he ’pears to look mightly
baggy, somehow.” And he ketched Dan’l by the nap of the
neck, and lifted him up and says, “Why, blame my cats, if he
don’t weigh five pound!” and turned him upside down, and
he belched out a double handful of shot. And then he see
how it was, and he was the maddest man—he set the frog
down and took out after that feller, but he never ketched him.
And—

(Here Simon Wheeler heard his name called from the front
yard, and got up to see what was wanted.) And turning to me
as he moved away, he said: “Just set where you are, stranger,
and rest easy—I ain’t going to be gone a second.”

But, by your leave, I did not think that a continuation of
the history of the enterprising vagabond Jim Smiley would be
likely to afford me much information concerning the Rev.
Leonidas W. Smiley, and so I started away.

At the door I met the sociable Wheeler returning, and he
buttonholed me and recommenced:

“Well, this-yer Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that
didn’t have no tail, only just a short stump like a bannanner,
and—”

“Oh, hang Smiley and his afflicted cow!” I muttered
good-naturedly, and bidding the old gentleman good-day, I
departed.